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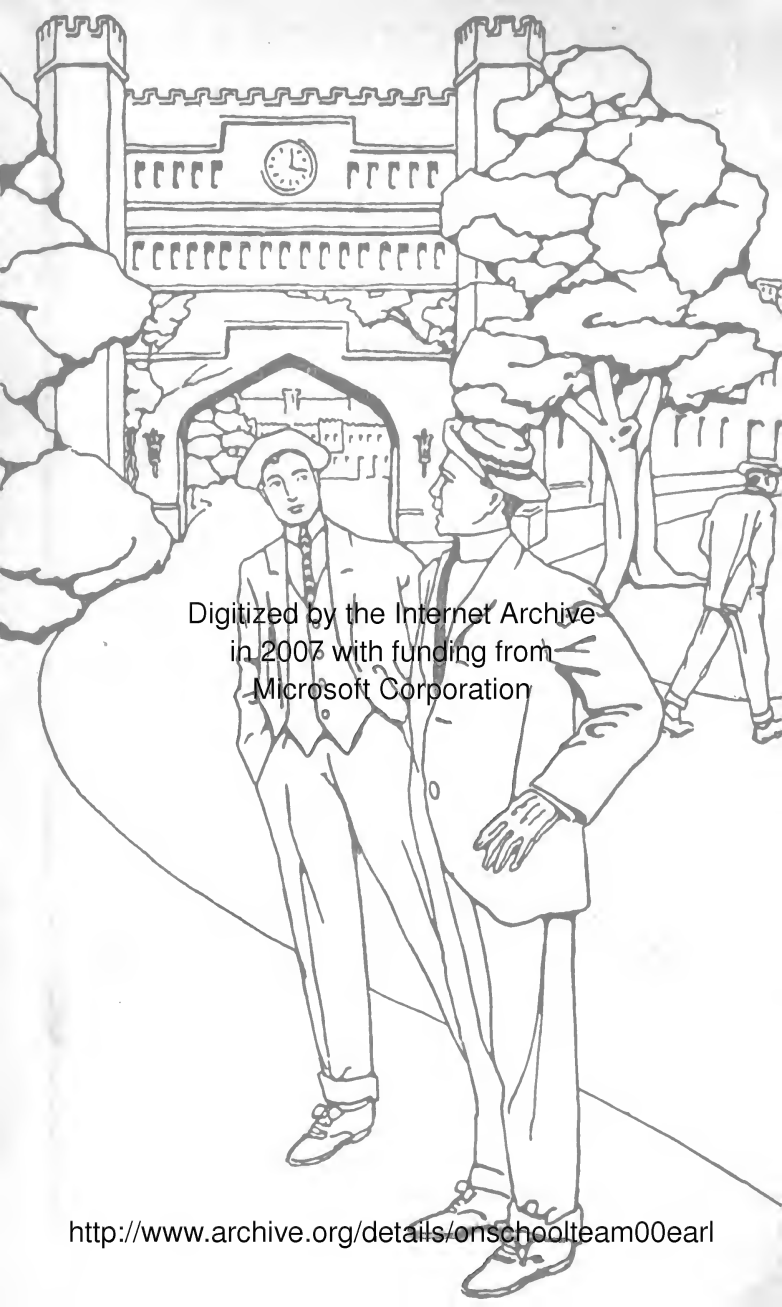
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ON THE SCHOOL TEAM



JOHN PRESCOTT EARL



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"DO YOU WANT TO GET IN?" HE ASKED

On The School Team



BY



John Prescott Earl

Author of
"The School Team in Camp"

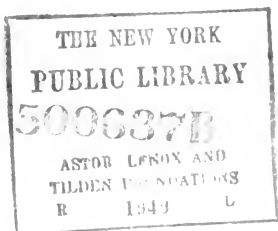
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*To my sister Elizabeth,
who first knew Bob*

Introduction

THIS book concerns Bob Farrar and "The Crowd" at Standham Academy, what they thought of each other, of their games, of Standham, and their great rival, Conway. They had the good times that fall naturally to healthy young Americans. If any reader lays down the book wishing he did not have to say good-bye to them, let him remember Bob's off-hand invitation to Jack for a summer in camp in the heart of Maine. The many adventures of that vacation in the open are told in "The School Team in Camp." And after that came school again, with Bob and his friends advanced to the dignity of Seniors, and how they felt about it appears in "Captain of the School Team."

JOHN PRESCOTT EARL.

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On the School Team

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCING THE CROWD

A BOY flung open the door of No. 29 Stone Hall, snatched off his cap and threw it with swift accuracy of aim at another boy across the room, who was industriously stuffing books hit or miss into a bookcase.

"Bob!" cried the assaulted one, scrambling to his feet and starting on a rush for the door.

The first boy dropped his suit-case, cleared an intervening table at a jump and grappled with him. For a minute the two tugged and strained, then they went down together and rolled over and over on the floor. They brought up against a pile of packing boxes, hockey sticks, clothes, tennis rackets, blankets, bats, sofa pillows and golf clubs. There they

separated themselves and sat up, Turkish fashion, to take stock of each other.

"Hello, Jack," remarked the newcomer, his gray eyes shining happily.

"Hello, yourself," responded the other boy, grinning.

"Feeling pretty fit, Jack?"

"First-rate, Bob."

"You look it. Been putting on muscle during the summer, I notice."

"Glad you felt it. Yes, I've tried to keep in training. You haven't been loafing 'round under a sunshade yourself, I take it."

"Referring to the lily whiteness of my complexion, Jack?"

"Just that."

"Make you think of anything, does it?"

"Chocolate cake, coffee berries, brown bread, wild Injuns ——"

"Go to the head. The pater couldn't tell me from a half breed guide. A camp in the backwoods of Maine's just the place to put on tan, layers of it. You ought to have seen me when I first came out! I've whitened a good bit already."

"Nobody'd know it if you didn't tell 'em.

Broadened some too, haven't you?" Jack eyed the other's shoulders critically.

"Inch. Pretty good, that, isn't it? I say, old fellow, you must come up there with me next summer. It's great! Streams crammed with trout, woods chuck full of bears and elk. Open season for deer doesn't come till fall, but I saw some ripping antlers! Tell you all about it some day. Nice mess you've got here."

"Thought you'd like it."

The two gazed cheerfully about the disordered room. Blank white walls stared back at them. Against one stood the bookcase Jack had been busy with at the moment of Bob's entrance; its upper shelf was full, the next showed a wide gap, the lowest was entirely empty, while from the second a cataract of books poured helter-skelter to the heap below and spread out, sprawling open or face-downward on the hardwood floor. In one corner lay a pile of rugs; in another, a desk, a couch, a small table and the cushions of the window seat elbowed each other unceremoniously. Pictures, large and small, leaned against an overturned chair near by. Through the open

door that gave entrance from the study to the bedroom more bare walls, more boxes and other heaps of unassorted possessions met the eye, together with a glimpse of narrow white-enameled beds.

The boy called Bob spoke again. "Pretty good place, isn't it? We were in luck to get it, sure. But I reckon I can add a little to the general appearance." He jumped up and began to tug at the straps of his suit-case. "You don't usually get first innings like this, Jack."

"No, I never came ahead of you before. Couldn't believe my eyes when I walked in and found not a sign of my bunker. What did it?"

"Four hours delay at Albany. Freight wreck ahead of us; nobody hurt, but we had to wait for a clear track. When they told me how long, I knew you'd beat me at Standham and I began to think you'd get this place all settled before we pulled out of Albany." The refractory suit-case fell open and Bob emptied it upon the miscellaneous heap in the middle of the room. "There!" he said, "now things are as mixed as they can be and we'll begin

to clear up. Seen many of the fellows, Jack? I didn't meet a soul I knew coming up. Who's here, anyhow?"

"About all the crowd. Listen, here they come."

Footsteps sounded on the stairs, there was a rush through the corridor and the door of No. 29 flew open again, this time to admit not one but a dozen boys. They sprang at the new arrival.

"Hello, Farrar!"

"How are you, Bob?"

"My, but you're brown!"

"Well, it's good to see you, Farrar?"

The gray-eyed boy returned these greetings with interest. "How'd you know I'd come?" he demanded, shaking hands vigorously.

"How'd we know it? Think these ceilings are a yard thick? Heard you, Bobby, my son, heard the sound of yours and Jack's customary gentle style of salutation on meeting after absence." The tall shock-headed speaker perched on an empty packing box, the other boys spread themselves over the study table and roosted here and there on overturned chairs. "Drop through the floor

just any time you two care for the descent," he continued hospitably, "we'll catch you if the plaster doesn't brain us first. Ned and I bunk right under here, you know. But when it comes to study hours," he shook his head solemnly, "when it comes to that, Bob and Jack, you'll have to keep quiet, you know. I've got to make a rule right now and have you all understand that I mustn't be disturbed in study hours; it's bad for my marks."

A shout greeted this statement.

"You needn't laugh," sighed the shock-headed youth, his face grave as a stone image's. "I have let you fellows override my natural inclinations too long. You don't know what a bright and shining light of learning you have been putting out in me."

"That we have been putting out is good, Shorty," cried Bob. "Mr. Wetherell's got after you, has he?"

"The principal and I have had some conversation upon the matter. He appreciates my abilities, he takes occasion to encourage me onward along the narrow path of knowledge."

"Any alternative offered if you stray from the road?" asked Jack.

Shorty turned rueful eyes on the questioner. "I should hate to leave you, Jackstraws," he said. "It would grieve me to say farewell to all these little friends of mine." He pulled out a handkerchief and with it solemnly dabbed his eyes.

"You shan't," declared Bob cheerfully. "Just leave that to us. We'll attend to it, won't we, fellows? All in favor, say yes!"

"Yes! Yes!" shouted a dozen voices.

"Done!" cried Bob. "I hereby announce that the fellows in this room constitute a body banded together for the protection of Shorty's study hours and for his advancement along the paths of learning. The sound of grinding shall be heard from below."

"You'll overdo it," demurred Shorty. "I'm no dig."

"We'll see to it you don't get fired at mid-years, Shorty," said Bob firmly.

A tall broad-shouldered boy a year or two older than those gathered in the room put his head in the door. "Hello, Farrar!" he drawled. "Getting settled? Drop around to

my place some time this evening, won't you? I'll be home after nine."

"All right, Gid. Doesn't look much like settling, does it?" Bob cast a whimsical glance at the study in its undress array.

The boy in the door grinned in his turn and with a nod to the others took himself off down the hall.

"Well," remarked Shorty, "that promises pretty fair, Bob. Private interview with the football captain ought to net you a place on the team. Maybe Gid wants you to choose your own position. 'Take any little thing you like, Bob. I'll make it right with the other chaps.'" Shorty's imitation of the captain's slow speech made the boys rock back and forth hilariously. Ned Hensley, on the pile of rugs, lost his balance and slid to the floor. Shorty stretched out a long arm, lifted his roommate and set him back on his uncertain pinnacle.

Bob flushed a little. "Oh, I say," he protested, "it won't be such a soft snap as that! If I make the team, I'll have to work hard for it all right."

"You'll have the whole of 19— behind

you," cried Ned, balancing himself dexterously. "And I guess you won't find it such a hard berth to get nor to fill after you've got it."

"You forget the new fellows, Ned," Bob objected. "There may be some stars among them, you know. Gid himself came in last year. Anybody seen anything of 'em yet? Know of any new senior middlers?"

Shorty, who was a near-sighted youth, adjusted his glasses. They added much to that expression of deep solemnity which formed the habitual mask of his incorrigible spirit. "Yes," he said, "there's one addition to the class, anyway. Bob and all the rest of you popular fellows better look to yourselves. You'll find your noses out of joint pretty soon."

"Where's he going to live?"

"Who is he, Shorty?"

"What's his name?"

"Enters our class, you say?"

"Know him?"

Shorty gazed at the questioners silently.

"Go on, go on!" They cried. "Why don't you limber up your tongue?"

"Thought you'd taken out a patent on that yourselves."

"Help yourself to the floor, we'll keep still," Bob promised for the Crowd.

"First you want to know where this great and glorious addition to the class of 19—lives when he's here at school, do you?"

"Yes, yes. Go ahead, can't you?"

Shorty regarded the impatient one calmly. "I wouldn't get stirred up," he said. "It—lives," drawling teasingly, "in—Dwight. It's name is Denslow—Edward Long Denslow, never Ned for short and not at all at your service. It enters our class, so I am informed upon authority I cannot see my way to question, worse luck! to wit, the principal, aforementioned in this conversation. And I have met it, far be it from me to assume any more familiar intercourse with its high mightiness. The facts, inquiring friends, are these. I, Hobart Forbes, was some hours ago inadvertently passing by the office of the principal of this hoary institution," Shorty waved a hand dramatically.

"Oh, cut it out!" groaned two or three voices, "get down to facts, can't you?"

“What else am I giving you? Sorry you don’t like my style, but I’ll stump any of you to better it. As I said, I was passing by the executive office of this hoary, time-honored, etc., etc., academy when I was hailed within on a summons from our esteemed principal.” Shorty’s voice dropped suddenly from its rhetorical tone. “There stood a fellow about my age, not so long, dark, strongly built, pretty well set up. Says Mr. Wetherell, ‘Hobart Forbes, this is Edward Denslow. Denslow is entering a senior middler, Forbes, so you will be classmates. He has been assigned a room in Dwight House. Take him down to Dwight, won’t you, Forbes, show him around a little and introduce him to others of his class.’

“The fellow picked up his suit-case, stuck a hat on his head and we started out, eyeing each other like two strange dogs.” Shorty chuckled reminiscently. “Well, I laid myself out to be polite. Told him all about Dwight and the fellows in it, touched up the instructors a bit, ticketed all the buildings we passed with the right names, gave him the lay of the land. Oh, I was as good as a map

of the campus! Fellow didn't seem exactly communicative at first, so I sailed in with a few questions, just to keep up conversation, you understand. Couldn't let it die on my hands before I'd landed him at Dwight. Asked him whether this was his first try at a prep school, where he'd been before, how he liked it, how he expected to like this, a string of the usual sort. He shut up like a clam. Give you my word for it! Couldn't get a decent answer out of him. Things got pretty frigid before we reached Dwight. I felt as though I'd been associating with an iceberg. Fact. Had to take a sprint around the quadrangle before I could get warm again."

"Was he shy, Shorty?" queried Bob. "That doesn't generally faze you——"

"Shy! He, shy? That's a good one! Bobby, my son, he was as cocksure of himself as—as the president of these United States. Trouble was, he wasn't sure of me. Didn't know my grandfather probably, hadn't any personal acquaintance with my seven-times-great-grandmother."

"Oh, come now, isn't that a little too bad?"

"Maybe so, Bob. I don't know what ailed

the fellow. It might be that as well as anything else. His manner was the sweetest combination of mind - your - own - business, hands-off-my-private-affairs, see-you-in-Jericho effects it was ever my bad luck to rub up against. He'll kill himself if he keeps that up here."

"Maybe he's different when you know him." Bob spoke with characteristic hopefulness. "He was new to the place, everybody strange to him and you're a little, well, overpowering yourself at times, Shorty."

"I! Wait till you've seen this Denslow, Bob Farrar! Then you can call me a word like that if you want to. Go on and get acquainted if you like, I'll stand by to pick up the pieces. And I give you my word I behaved this afternoon like an angel with wings on. 'Twasn't I set him off."

Bob laughed. "Well, I hope he'll prove a decent sort in the end, since he's 19—. Any more new chaps?"

"We've got one in this house," said Jack, "entering senior middler too, I hear. Beck, or Becker or Breck—some such name. Looks like a good enough sort."

"Any raw material anywhere for the subs?"

"A few pretty fair lookers," volunteered Ned Hensley. "They ought to limber up well on the gridiron or the oval. Lots of little duffers, too, as usual."

The talk drifted to vacation topics, to interchange of summer experiences and animated comment on leg and arm development. The boys tested muscle with expert enthusiasm.

They belonged, Bob Farrar, Jack Truman, Ned Hensley, Shorty Forbes and the others gathered in Bob's and Jack's room, to what was known at Standham Academy as "The Crowd." There are four classes at Standham, junior, junior middler, senior middler and senior, the first three familiarly shortened to june, ju-mid, and s'mid, or simply mid. The Crowd was a group of senior-middlers, rooming in and out of Stone Hall, who for one reason and another in their first two years had become particularly good friends. They had no organization, they professed no exclusive interest in each other. By common consent they had drifted together and by equally common consent the school had dubbed them

"The Crowd." They were not particularly cliquey in their comradeship, no boy felt embarrassed in their presence because he was merely with them and not of them. The Crowd was an elastic body, it seemed to embrace for the time being whoever chanced to be in the neighborhood of its leading spirits, it made no boy feel superfluous or in the way. Asked to define it, a Standham student would have found difficulty in marshalling his words. "The Crowd?" he would have been likely to say, "The Crowd, is—why, it's the Crowd, that's all, Bob Farrar and Jack Truman, Shorty Forbes, Ned Hensley and the rest."

On this particular night before the opening of Standham Academy's fall term Bob Farrar found it necessary to speak plainly to his friends.

"See here, fellows," he said at last, "Jack and I have got to get busy. Excuse us, won't you? And don't any of you go, we'll find ways to make you useful. Hand me that screen, will you, Ned? Have any of you fellows cornered a step ladder? There's one in your room, Hunt? I'll get it. You can take it home when we've hung these pictures.

You're not very keen on it just now, I reckon. Seen the picture hooks, Jack? I left 'em in this drawer last June."

Jack, again stuffing books with both hands into the bookcase, nodded at a waste-basket. "I pulled out that drawer to find some pins," he explained. "Whole thing turned turtle. Guess you'll find the hooks in the basket."

"Wire too?" asked Bob. "These walls are higher than ours last year. I've got to piece out some of the old wires to make the pictures hang right."

"Now where'd I see some wire lately? Not in the basket, Bob. Try that box over there, the one you packed your sofa pillows in. Scrap Hayes came in to borrow my hammer and as I didn't know when I'd see it again I opened all our boxes, yours as well as mine."

Bob fished the coils of picture wire from among his cushions and straightened out the kinks. Then he stripped off his coat and fell to work. The energy displayed by their hosts inspired the other boys to go and do likewise. One by one they wandered off at the call of their unsettled rooms.

By nine o'clock no one would have recognized in the completed study the disordered room of a few hours earlier. The pictures were hung; a long hunting scene of Bob's, bright with the red of the huntsmen's coats, filled in the space above the broad low book-case; three or four good prints, a water-color or two, all of outdoor subjects, shared the rest of the walls with half a dozen gay athletic posters depicting young giants in football or running or boating rigs. The curving window seat, heaped high with cushions, the handiwork of Bob's and Jack's sisters and girl cousins, offered a pleasant lounging place. In the corner beyond, the boys' desk, their joint property, stood near another window, whose outlook on tennis courts, running track and little river promised in the daytime at least to offer continual temptation to the would-be worker. Against the wall opposite the window seat a couch reared its load of pillows almost to the long rack holding guns, fishing rods, tennis rackets, hockey sticks, snowshoes and other appliances of sport. In the middle of the room stood the oak study table, supplied with clean sheets of blotting

paper and littered with a few magazines and the books that refused to be squeezed into the bookcase. A big leather chair or two held out inviting arms. A shelf bearing the proud burden of one small clock and five silver cups, the latter trophies of athletic victories, at home and at school, completed the room's main furnishings. Jack switched on the two green-shaded study lamps and the boys surveyed their handiwork with satisfaction.

It was not a show room nor was it strictly plain. One would recognize it on sight as belonging to boys; there were no nicknacks to fall down, no superfluous furniture to get in the way. The table and desk bore scars of usage, the leather of the chairs showed wear. Perhaps for this very reason the room wore a wholesome, livable look, a welcoming, make-yourself-at-home air.

Its owners punched each other cheerfully.

"I say, this is the best yet, isn't it, Bob?"

Bob agreed. "Fine! We can swing a cat in here and not knock chunks off the plastering as we always did in our last year's bunk." In lieu of the cat he seized a golf club and brandished it broadly. "Good thing, space,"

he remarked as he returned the club to its corner.

Then he glanced at the little clock industriously ticking its way toward a quarter past nine. He stuck his head into the bedroom. By contrast with the orderly study it took on a more completely chaotic look. "Let's leave this till to-morrow, Jackstraws. There's room enough for us to crawl into bed to-night, I guess. I must run down and see what Gid wants."

CHAPTER II

ABOUT A QUARTERBACK

Bob met Gid in the hall just outside the captain's door. He roomed alone, and this fact, added to the glory of his position, made him a very superior person, according to the school's way of thinking. Very few boys did that at Standham Academy. Many of them shared suites, two, three, or even four possessing one study with a bedroom or two adjoining. There were also "dormer rooms," so called by the boys, where eight or ten slept together. The Standham dormitories had been built with an eye to economy of space and these rooms of Gid's were originally intended for an extra instructor. As this instructor had not yet been found necessary they fell each year by right of privilege to a senior.

Gid turned on the lights and bade Bob make himself at home. The study was a luxurious little place and Bob picked out a particularly soft morris chair.

"I want to talk with you a bit about this season's football, Farrar." Gid always came straight to a point with no bush-beating. "And I asked you to come down here because we needn't be interrupted. I presume you've guessed what I'm going to say. I want you to try for quarterback on the team."

Bob gasped. "No, Gid," he said, "I hadn't a notion of that! Of course I supposed it was something about football, but—do you really think I could?"

"I most certainly do." The captain drew up a chair opposite Bob. "You see it's this way, Farrar. I've gone over things pretty thoroughly in my mind during the summer and as I figure out the matter we're in rather a hole. With last year's seniors we lost our best players and we've got to work like dogs to make much of a showing without them. Of course we've a few stars left, Dudley, half back, Buck, tackle, Pitkin, guard—those positions look plain enough. There's a chance of some fellows making good this year who didn't show up very well last, and of course there's always the hope of striking gold in some chap entering high. But we

can't bank on that. The long and short of it is, as I see it, that we've got to get down and dig if we mean to beat Conway this year. They have as good a team as their last. I know some fellows going in there this fall on advanced standing and they're corkers, no mistake. Then Conway can fall back on pretty good old material in their juniors; they correspond to our senior middlers. Your class is well enough, Farrar, but it can't make up for what we've lost. No, this year Standham won't be much on brilliance, nothing gilt-edged; not many show plays for us. We'll have to leave the skyrockets to the other side. Our dependence must be on team work. Solid, steady practice, that's what we've got to go in for. If we work like cart-horses, maybe we can turn out a fairly decent team, one that can hold Conway to a low score. If we succeed in doing that it won't matter how many other games we sacrifice. I'm ready to throw away the whole series if by doing it we can whip Conway—oh, not unnecessarily, you know, only if it comes to the pinch.

“This is a pretty long introduction.

Here's what I'm driving at. I want you, Farrar, to work for quarterback because you are the only fellow I know of now who can come within a stone's throw of filling the place. You did good work in the game last year; you saved the day for us by a minute of snappy play and you ought to make the regular team this year. I shall slate you there. Of course you know these early appointments are provisional and subject to change later when the final list is made out. I don't promise you the place, Farrar. I only say I shall play you as quarterback the first of the season. It rests with you to keep the position. If I find among the new fellows any one better fitted for it, to him it goes. We've got the good name of the school to look out for, you know, and we must put its reputation ahead of our private concerns, our own likings and dislikings. You're with me there?"

"Indeed I am, Gid. You can count on me to do my best. I guess I don't have to say I'm much obliged for the chance—you know all that. But—I'll try to keep the place."

Gid held out his hand. "All right, Far-

rar. I was pretty certain of you. Be on hand for practice to-morrow at four-thirty sharp. All this has just been between ourselves, you understand."

"Of course, Gid. You can trust me not to talk."

On the third floor, his own, Bob turned a handspring that landed him by the door of No. 29. There he straightened up and walked in on his feet.

A few minutes later, when the two boys were going to bed, moving cautiously in narrow spaces, Jack remembered Bob's appointment with the football captain.

"What did Gid want?" he asked. Just then an uncalculated movement of his arm toppled over a pile of the contents of his trunk. "Botheration!" he groaned. "Well, let 'em stay there till morning if they like it on the floor!"

Bob manœuvred his way carefully between a Scylla and Charybdis of overcoats, sweaters and underwear that threatened at any moment to engulf his path. "All ready?" he inquired with his hand on the electric button.

Jack put one foot in bed and took a hasty farewell survey of his surroundings. "Turn her out."

Bob clicked the button and in the darkness made a leap for his own bed. A soft sound of sliding, followed by a rattling crash, accompanied his landing. He burrowed between the sheets and came up chuckling.

"What'd you do with those plates we had to set out spreads on?" he demanded of his equally gleeful roommate.

"Do with 'em? I don't know. Oh, yes, I set 'em on your old gray sweater. That seemed a nice soft berth. You don't mean ——"

"Anything else likely to make such a howling racket? They're goners, I guess. We'll have a crockery-smashing bout in the morning if the pieces are big enough, call in the fellows and take turns popping at 'em from twenty paces."

A minute later Jack raised himself on an elbow. "You didn't tell me what Gid wanted," he remarked sleepily.

"Said he counted on me to do my best this fall," came promptly from the other bed.

"That all! Having heart-to-heart talks with the whole outfit?"

"Don't know. Nobody else there when I was."

"Huh!" Jack dropped back. "I thought he'd say you were sure of making the team at least."

Soon Jack was sound asleep. Bob felt too excited to be able to follow at once. While the captain's view of the situation had made him serious it had not shaken his cheerful outlook on the coming football season. But Gid's other words had roused within him a multitude of eager personal hopes. They held out to him the chance of making real his dream.

As a small boy Bob had owned one great ambition, to grow up an athlete. To attain this end he had set himself with all the power of his sturdy will. His assets in the undertaking had been a body, straight, healthy and strong, as normal bodies go, added to pluck, persistence, and patience.

Bob could not remember the time when he had not admired strength. Wherever he saw it he loved the power of it, he liked to feel his

own suppleness responding to his will, he wanted to be the master of his muscles. In this his father had encouraged him. Together, even when Bob was a little boy, they had hunted, fished and trapped, the youngster often riding the man's shoulder. With his lungs full of fresh outdoor air Bob had grown up to grammar school days and passed through them into preparatory school, putting on strength by exercise, and skill by practice. One rare gift he possessed, which helped him not a little toward the realization of his ambition, for even as a youngster it had been no common every-day sort of prowess that Bob had set out to make his own. This gift was the ability to get some information from every person he met. From his comrades and his instructors in the gymnasium and on the oval he learned no more than from chance acquaintances, picked up in odd corners and made communicative by the charm that was Bob's heritage. It was a brakeman who taught him his best trick in wrestling and a tramp who let him into the secret of how to pitch a ball particularly baffling in its curve.

And now Bob was beginning to see the results of his industry. He possessed a lithe, sinewy, active body, uniformly well developed—Bob's father had strongly denounced training any one set of muscles at the expense of others—a body that obeyed his will deftly and easily. Moreover, four of the cups on the study shelf belonged to him; the fifth was Jack's.

Bob's first big triumph had come to him the previous year. Called from the substitute bench for the final minute of play in Standham's football contest with Conway he had taken quick advantage of a chance fumble and had won the game for his school. His memory grew warm over that minute and those that had followed it, when in their frenzy of delight the boys had set him on their shoulders and carried him in line with the regular players around the field. The prestige of that minute's work had come with him into a new football season. If he could only do as well this year—no, better—Bob Farrar was not a boy content to stand still. If he could justify Gid's confidence in him, Bob clenched his hands under his pillow,

then next year—but he would not think about next year nor the years after, his college days. Yet he could not shut out from his consciousness the knowledge that to do well in preparatory school, to make good there, would be to carry a favorable record up to college, a record that would be something to build upon even in his freshman year. To make the varsity eleven and wear a sweater with a big white letter was Bob's coveted goal.

"But after all it's the play," he said to himself, "it's the good hard work, the skill, that count. It's not just having fellows shout your name and look up to you and point you out to strangers on the campus." Yet in his heart Bob knew he valued these things too. Popularity was no stranger to Bob Farrar. It had perched on his shoulder since his knickerbocker days and to his credit be it said the close acquaintance had not spoiled him. But this kind of popularity was different. It rested on hard work, strength, agility, training, eminence of one's own deserving—that was the distinction Bob strove for with all his muscle.

"I'll work," he whispered to himself. "I'll work hard for it." Then he fell asleep to dream of sprinting toward far away goal posts, a football tucked securely under his arm, between waving lines of people that rose up and shouted after him something he had no ears to hear.

The next afternoon Bob was promptly on hand at the practice field. He found it dotted with boys, new and old.

"Here, Farrar, take a bunch of those chaps, won't you, get 'em limbered up and see what's in 'em," the captain directed. "Buck and Dudley, you take a dozen or two more. Give 'em easy practice."

Bob promptly captured the ball that rolled his way and followed by a dozen boys of varying heights and ages turned toward a corner of the field. He formed them in a ring and set them at work passing the ball. Most of them made queer work of it.

"Not that way! A straight-arm pass. You're sure to lose it if you take hold like that. Watch me now. That's better. Oh, you'll catch on after a try or two. It takes practice, of course. I've been at it a good

many years. Drop! Drop! Whenever you fumble always drop on the ball. Played before, I see." This to a boy who whenever his turn came handled the ball with the ease of familiarity. "See that fellow in the middle of the field? That's Pitkin, left guard on the team. Go over there and tell him Farrar sent you. He's got the crowd that knows the game. You belong there."

The boy trotted away.

Bob turned to the next, a pale-faced little fellow, slight, with an old face, and a mop of curly light-brown hair. This boy and a football proved total strangers.

"Try that again. See, like this! You won't lose it this time. There's a knack about catching a ball. That's better. Pass. You mustn't be afraid of it, you know. Here, let me show you. Easy there. Now spread out in line. I want to see how quick you can start after I snap the ball." So Bob cajoled and encouraged his raw recruits and swiftly assorted the degrees of ignorance before him.

He was practicing them in falling on the ball when he became aware of a boy in foot-

ball clothes standing by looking on. He was older than those in the squad, about Bob's own age perhaps, and his broad shoulders and sturdy build promised more than average strength. Bob swung around upon him quickly. "Do you want to get in?" he asked.

The boy's dark face lightened. "Let her go," he said. He fell upon the ball with a quick clean dive. Bob, neglecting the others for a minute, put him through a swift succession of plays.

"That'll do. You've played a lot, haven't you?"

"Oh, more or less."

At that moment Bob spied Gid striking across the field toward his corner. "What's your name?" he asked.

"Denslow, Edward Denslow."

"Then you're the fellow Shorty Forbes was talking about! Entering senior-middler, aren't you?"

"Yes," said the boy shortly. His face darkened. "What's that got to do with it?"

Bob looked at him in surprise, but he answered quietly, "We're in the same class.

My name's Farrar. And I'm mighty glad you play ball, Denslow. We need some good new men this fall. Gid," he wheeled to the captain, who came up at that minute, "here is a fellow you ought to know, Denslow of 19—. He can play."

The captain nodded to the new boy. "Glad of it," he said. "Go over there where you see those gray sweaters. Or—hold on a minute. How do the others pan out, Farrar?"

"I've sent one to Pitkin. The rest don't amount to much, most of 'em new to a ball, you know. Don't understand what it's for yet."

"Finish 'em up with a half-mile run," Gid ordered. "Take the names of the best, the fellows with any promise at all. Then send 'em home. They'll have had enough for the first day. Come,—Denslow, is it?"

Bob turned back to his squad. Most of the boys stood idle. The pale-faced youngster had persuaded a bigger boy to snap the ball to him and he was doing his best to capture it. Determination puckered his old-young face, but the elusive ball continued to baffle

his efforts. It wriggled easily from his hold and rolled away over the grass.

Bob formed his men in line for the run and started them off. "Come to-morrow," he said to the second one who passed him. The others looked up hopefully as they went by, but only twice did Bob repeat his words. He asked a name or two and scribbled them in his note-book. The rest knew that they had been tried and found wanting. Absorbed in their practice the two at one side had not noticed what was going on. Bob watched for a minute in silence. "That's enough for to-day," he said at last. "Better follow the line."

The larger boy started at once. The other lingered a moment. "Shall I come to-morrow?" he asked.

Bob hesitated. He hated to dim the eagerness in the youngster's face, but he was too honest to hold out false hopes. "I'm sorry," he said, "but I don't believe we'll need you. You see you're a bit small yet for football," he added kindly.

Without a word the boy turned and trotted after the jogging runners. "He took it

hard," thought Bob, "harder than most, though he didn't say anything. Queer little chap."

Then he sprinted, caught up with the head of the line and led his squad down to the brook and back by a path across the fields to the gymnasium. When, after a shower and rub-down, he turned the key in his locker ready to leave the building, the captain came by. "Pretty good find of yours this afternoon, Farrar," he said. "That Denslow will bear watching."

CHAPTER III

SHORTY'S "BENEFIT"

A MONTH later two scowling boys confronted each other across the study table in No. 29 Stone Hall. They were hot with an exercise of brain that came less easy to them than that of muscle, and their faces dripped perspiration in proportion to the information soaked up by their minds. Through the open windows their voices, raised in singsong conscienceless chant floated out on the warm October darkness.

"O di immortales! Ubinam gentium sumus? in qua urbe vivimus?" droned Jack from behind a barricade of Latin books. "Ubinam gentium—now what kind of a genitive is that?" He whirled the leaves of his grammar.

"Let the angle aBc be a right angle," mumbled the coatless Bob opposite, his fingers in his ears.

A kick skilfully administered removed them.

"Bob, you've done your Cicero. What'd you make out of this place, ubinam gentium sumus? Somehow I can't run down that genitive!"

Bob craned his neck toward the book Jack held out. "Where is it?"

"Here, top o' the page, third line. It beats me."

"Oh, that's partitive genitive. It keeps company with adverbs of quantity, place, extent. You'll find it in a note somewhere under Partitive Genitive. I had a long hunt to find it, myself. See here, d'you Q. E. D. that corollary on page twenty-five?"

Jack nodded and moved his hand toward a book stuffed with papers.

"Oh, I'll try awhile longer myself; got the rest done." Bob returned his fingers to his ears. "Then let the angle cBd equal ——"

Jack ran over the pages of his Latin grammar again, and this time in a note he found lurking the very ubinam gentium in question. Then he too, stopped his ears and the room held only a confused buzz of sonorous Latin and of geometric demonstration.

As it continued, now and again a heavy

body struck against the wall adjoining; upstairs boots dropped with increasing frequency, through the window by the desk bellowed a "Shut-up" calculated to rattle the casements. Serenely oblivious of these happenings, disturbed only by the occasional swoop of an awkward insect attracted by the light the two boys droned on.

Across the campus the clock on Centre Hall struck nine slow strokes. A minute later the little timepiece that kept company with the silver cups on the study shelf tinkled forth the hour. Doors opened and shut noisily throughout the house, feet scrambled up-stairs and down, shouts filled the halls. Bob and Jack, laboring hard, studied on, unheeding.

Suddenly with a wrathful shove the door burst open and a book, just missing Bob's head, plunged into the yawning waste-basket.

"Clear the decks for action," shouted Ned Hensley. "We're going to finish you two. Oh, my prophetic soul, they're cramming yet! Don't you know it's after study hours? See, fellows! Come here, Shorty! Look at Bob and Jackstraws digging through to China!"

"Why, hello, hello! Come in, all of you.

Reviewing, of course, and we didn't notice when the clock struck. Haven't the rest of you been at it too? Were we making rather a racket? Could you hear us?" Bob bundled his littered papers together hospitably.

The throng of boys swept into the room and stood there grinning.

"Hear you? Did I understand you to inquire whether we could hear you?" demanded Shorty. "Oh, no, certainly not. That was just the trouble. We couldn't understand such sepulchral stillness." He turned to the others. "They're through. Show's done. Any of you chaps that have anything to do, run along. I'm going to stay."

Most of the Crowd and half a dozen other boys disposed themselves on the couch, in the window seat and over the big chairs as the door shut on the rest.

"Keeping your marks polished up to football standard, Bob?" asked Shorty.

Bob laughed. "S'pose I make it, I wouldn't like to get bounced from the team on account of low standing," he said. "And you know, Shorty, the faculty are pretty particular about that. They'll down a fellow

quick as a wink if he falls off in his work. I'd hate to have Gid call me up and say, 'You're ruled off my list, Farrar. Work not up to concert pitch.' "

"They're gettin' too squeamish for any use here," growled Scrap Hayes. "Pretty soon a fellow'll have to get A's and B's in every single course he takes if he's to play on a team or row in a crew or represent the school at all. I don't see any use in mixin' things like that."

"Oh, well," said Bob, "I don't suppose we're here exactly for football or rowing. The faculty are afraid we'll lose sight of the main thing unless they prop it up now and then with some sort of ruling like this, that a fellow not up to the mark in his work shan't stand for the school in sport. But I wish the marks came a little easier."

With a bang the door flew open and two more boys came in.

"What was the row? Just heard over in Horton you'd had a raid." The smaller, greeted as Spud, subsided into the coil on the window seat. The other, the new boy named Breck, crossed over to the couch.

"They told us in Horton that the team is to be posted to-morrow noon," he said. "It's a matter for congrats, I take it. You're going to be on Farrar."

Bob answered with a laugh that he tried to make careless, "Thank you, Breck, but I'm afraid you're running ahead of the facts. I'm not by any means sure of making the team, you know."

"Why not?" demanded Ned Hensley. "You've said something like that once before to-night, Bob Farrar, and I for one'd like to know what you mean by it. D'you think anybody's forgotten what you did last year? And you play forty per cent. better this fall. Isn't Gid working you as quarterback for the regulars? You're on the team now—what's to hinder your staying there?"

"Denslow. Gid plays me quarterback, but so he does Denslow too. I don't hold a mortgage on the position—not by a long shot!"

"Denslow!" cried Ned. "Denslow's sub, and a sub he'll stay."

"He's a pretty corking sub then," said Bob. "Did you see him yesterday? After the way

he put up that last play, I'd not like to talk too much about quarterbacks."

"Yes, I saw it," said Shorty. "I took it all in and I'll grant you it was good play. But, Bob Farrar, when it comes to the team, honor bright, can't you see there's no question about who'll be quarterback?"

Bob regarded the boys deliberately. "No," he said, "I don't deny I'd like to think it's so, but I can't. I should say—it may sound rather heady—but talking honestly I should say that Denslow and I are pretty well matched. There isn't a pound to choose between us and if there were any great difference in skill Gid and the coach wouldn't have such a time making up their minds which to leave on sub. You fellows know well enough who'll make every position but the quarterback's."

"And I tell you we know that well enough too," shouted Scrap Hayes. "See here, Bob, there's something besides skill to be considered, granting you that the skill's even, which I don't hold it is. If Gid should post Denslow for quarterback, there'd be a row in this school such as Gid himself couldn't stand up against!"

"Why?" asked Bob. "If Denslow's the better player——"

"You couldn't get a boy here to believe it," said Shorty. "Those of us who saw that game with Conway last year remember a thing or two about it. We saw who made the winning play, and the new fellows have ears to hear what's told 'em. What's more, who wants a stick to represent Standham? Tell me that."

"Hear! Hear!" chorused the boys.

"Perhaps Denslow doesn't mean—you know you were prejudiced at the start, Shorty."

"When has Denslow ever spoken a decent word to anybody?" Spud sat up straight in his excitement. "We all know the story of how he snubbed you, Bob Farrar, when you invited him to go rowing just after term opened. You didn't tell it, but I was in the boathouse and I heard. What fellows does Denslow go with? Can you name one chap he knows? He is glum and standoffish, he's treated us as though he thought we meant to insult him, until we've let him alone."

"That's so too," assented the boys.

"He's not Standham," cried Jim Hunt.

“He’s an outsider, an interloper. He may recite with us and room in one of our halls but he doesn’t belong to us. I’d about as soon pitch a Conway chap onto our team and call him quarterback as to see Denslow there. And lots of fellows feel the same way.”

The boys pounded out their approval with their heels.

“Well,” said Bob, “I don’t mind saying I’ll be glad enough to get there if I can, and have a chance to fight for Standham. But we’ve got to think of what’s for the good of the school, you know—that ought to come first. And if Gid thinks we can beat Conway by playing Denslow——”

“Beat Conway!” cried Scrap. “We’re going to mop the ground with it, and we’ll do it with you as quarterback, Bob Farrar!” The couch and the window seat set up a furious interchange of pillows.

“Cave the ink, won’t you?” warned Jack. “Conway’s not to be sneezed at this year. Its team averages ten pounds heavier than last year’s. A fellow told me who saw ’em play Saturday. We’ll have our hands full to beat ’em.”

"Gid knows it," said Bob. "That's why he's so cranky."

"Why, he's working you to skin 'n' bones too, isn't he?" Scrap asked. "It's all practice, practice, practice, with you these days."

"Has to be, I guess, Scrap. Don't you make your men go it hard while the season's on?"

Scrap, captain of 19—'s basketball team, grinned. He knew he had the reputation of being a tyrant where his team and its members were concerned, but 19— held the school championship.

"Thought Gid might be overdoing it a mite," he said.

"Well, it's a nice thing, ain't it," Jack reverted to the original subject, "for the faculty to run in these two quizzes to-morrow? The game with Oak Hill coming Saturday and everybody stirred up over appointments to the team—I should think we'd got enough on our minds without cramming for tests!"

A shade of anxiety settled on the boys' faces. Into their minds animated by considerations of football plays and players, crept worried thoughts of ablatives and angles.

"This study business," remarked Shorty ruefully, "isn't what it's cracked up to be. A featherweight in brains like me hasn't much show of knocking the spots out of 'em. I don't mind telling you I'm feeling melancholy to-night. Why couldn't they at least have kept the things a day apart?"

A pillow launched from the window hit Shorty fairly in the ribs. "That sounds well from a chap that got his Cicero all reviewed when I was only half way through the oration," cried Ned Hensley, dodging skilfully the return throw.

This turn of the subject appeared to the boys to hold possibilities of fun. They brightened instantly.

"The only trouble with Shorty's brains is that he doesn't give 'em half a chance," declared Bob. "How'd you manage, Ned?"

"Scrap Hayes and I locked him in and Scrap sat on the magazines and papers while I kept an eye on the windows. Locked them, too. Oh, yes, it was hot. Told him we wouldn't open up till he'd pass his word to bone until nine."

"Good story," said Shorty. "Just s'pose

I'd taken a notion to knock your heads together? What then? Got your math done, Bob?"

"Almost. I'm on the last original and I guess I've got the hang of it."

"Haven't touched mine. Say, let me cast an eye over yours, won't you?"

"No, I won't. You've got to stand or fall on your own brains, Shorty, not mine. Hate to seem disobliging, but you know what Mr. Blunt has said about doing independent work."

"Oh, well, I'll get up in the morning. Early bird crams the math, that'll be me. Say, Ned, there's an idea! Can't we make a little something out of that? Sort of side-show, you know, to benefit our pecuniary condition."

"Broke as soon as this, Shorty?" asked Jack. "Didn't you get your allowance just yesterday?"

"That needn't affect my being broke, need it? I used it up, if you must have the truth, Jackstraws, paying last month's debts. Got just twenty-nine cents to live on till the fifteenth of November, more than four weeks

off. Fact. And how am I going to the games on twenty-nine cents? I had intended, generous friends," Shorty waved his arms widely, "to borrow of you. But this is better. Yes, it is always better to earn one's way by the sweat of one's brow than to borrow it out of a near-by pocket. Q. E. D. Follow me? I'll do the stunt. See? Ned'll take the cash and we'll divvy the proceeds. How many of you fellows 'll pay five cents to see me study?"

A shout of ayes met Shorty's proposition. "All right. Drop around 'bout six. Show'll be on then. And spread it, won't you? A poor beggar doin' a trick wants to play to a full house."

"We'll send around to all the halls to-night," said Bob. "Shorty's Benefit, that's the way to advertise this thing, just like a concert or some theatrical stunt done to raise money for a needy cause. Shorty's the needy cause. Show'll begin at five; it'll net you twice as much if you start in early, Shorty."

Shorty groaned. "Oh, well; I can do it for once, I suppose. Let 'em all know it's

their positively first, last and only chance to see Shorty Forbes in his phenomenal, hair-raising, side-splitting feat of turning out Q. E. D.'s before breakfast."

"We'll raise the crowd, and don't you forget to get up," admonished Bob. "Own an alarm clock? Might have known you wouldn't!"

"I'll loan him mine," cried Jim Hunt.

"Set it for half past four," Bob ordered. "Scrap, you scuttle and get Jack's; you borrowed it last week, you know. I'll set that for the same hour, then we'll make sure Shorty doesn't sleep through the whole racket. He's equal to it, and we don't want any fizzle about this. Stone's reputation's in it and we can't afford to have the campus chortling over a fluke. Jack, Ned, Jim and Scrap, you take Dwight House and do it thoroughly. The rest of you fellows make a canvass of Horton. Shorty and I'll work out a sign. Sprint now, it's getting late."

Two minutes before the last bell rang in Stone, ordering lights out and quiet through the house, Jack dashed back into the study,

out of breath after his run from Dwight House.

“Bob,” he gasped, “what’d you think! Denslow’s gone—just taken—to-night—to sick ward—got the mumps!”

CHAPTER IV

STANDHAM TAKES THE FIELD

THE news of Denslow's removal to the sick ward sped fast, and for a few hours made a great stir throughout the school. His fellow students wasted no sympathy on the boy himself; their anxiety was all for the cause of his quarantine. Excited groups discussed who was likely next to fall a victim to the mumps and whether there might not be an epidemic in the football squad.

"Gid's had it, so he's safe."

"Pitkin and Buck say they've had it only on one side."

"What about Farrar?"

"Oh, he's all right—but sometimes, you know, folks get it again."

"Plague that Denslow! Why couldn't he have kept out of the thing! At least he needn't have gone and exposed the whole team!"

"Where d'ye s'pose he got it?"

"Don't know. Wish he'd never come here to Standham, that's all I know."

Even Gid himself was disquieted. The invasion of a "kid disease," as he put it, into the ranks of his team was a prospect he had no liking for, and the unfortunate Denslow roused hard thoughts in his captain's mind for perhaps half an hour. At the end of that time Gid had succeeded in finding the school physician.

"A mild case, this of Denslow's," the doctor said. "I understand he played football. He was present at yesterday's practice probably? Well, Sloane, I think you need feel no uneasiness about the rest of your team. I'll watch them a bit, but I am pretty certain they are safe enough. An isolated case this, I judge. Denslow was allowed to go home for a day a fortnight ago, Mr. Wetherell tells me. Quite likely he was exposed on the train. I look for nothing more serious than that his roommates may come down and I shall keep an eye on them to prevent any further spread of the disease. They are not football players, I believe, for which I may say I'm heartily glad on your account,

Sloane. Good luck to you in to-morrow's game."

When this interview became known throughout the school, and Gid Sloane made it so immediately, interest in Denslow flickered out at once. The boys dismissed him from their thoughts with a laugh and turned their attention to watching the bulletin board in Centre Hall for the promised announcement of the first eleven. Gid posted his list just as the clock struck twelve and it was the opinion of all who got near enough to read it or who heard it from the lips of those who could that the names would have been the same had there been no case of mumps in the school.

A few minutes later Bob, emerging with Shorty and some thirty other sufferers from under the grim shadow of the geometry test, found himself assaulted by the members of an earlier division.

"Hurrah! You're it, Bob!"

"Congrats, old man!"

"Who says Farrar can't play ball?"

"Three times three for the quarterback!"

"Say, let's take him over and show him the list!" cried Hunt.

"Make him read it out loud! He's been so hawful 'umble-minded," Shorty suggested.

Action followed this proposal with no breathing space between. Bob found himself wedged into a crowd of laughing, joking boys and borne along toward Centre Hall with no chance to dodge and run. There the throng about the bulletin board gave way grinning, on the approach of Bob's party. The boys marched him up to a position directly in front of Gid's posted list and halted. Bob's eyes fell at his first glance on a line half way down the sheet of paper.

Quarterback—R. Farrar.

"Read," came the command.

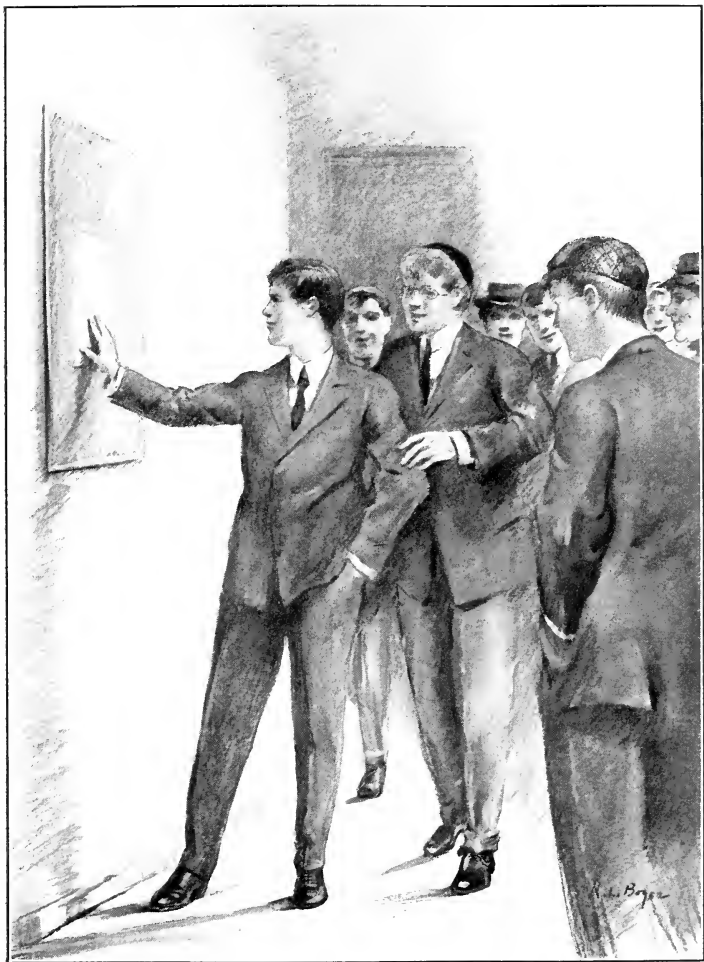
Bob laughed. "Want to hear it all?" he asked good-naturedly.

"Whole thing," Hunt ordered. "Not a syllable left out on pain of doing it again."

"Thought maybe you were interested in just one line." Bob's tone was unruffled.

"Never mind what you thought we thought, Bobby, my son," said Shorty. "Go ahead."

Bob started in his best oratorical manner.



"READ," CAME THE COMMAND

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He declaimed down to Centre—G. Sloane, and went on through the quarterback without a change of muscle.

“Repeat,” commanded the boys.

“From the beginning?”

“No, that line.”

Bob repeated.

“Again.”

Bob did so.

“Once more.”

Bob finished the list, still cool.

“Know who’s going to play quarter now, Bobby?”

With a quick lunge Bob sent Shorty sprawling against his neighbors.

“I know a little fellow who can’t seem to keep his feet,” he remarked. “Getting up early makes him wobbly. What’s more, if it wants any dinner to-day I’d advise this crowd to hustle.”

There was a scramble for the door. Shorty ran his arm through Bob’s. “You’re wrong, B. F.,” he said. “It’s just set me on my feet, financially, getting up this once. It was money in my pocket. Hear it rattle?” Shorty jingled some change gayly. “But

never again—never again will you see Shorty doing the lion act for the menagerie.”

“How much?” asked Bob.

“Pretty near a tenner, I reckon. Had quite a turnout, you remember.”

“I should say so. Most of the school was on hand, I guess, junes, ju-mids and even seniors. But how’d you manage, Shorty, with the racket that went on to get a thing done? Or did you bluff it all—the study part?”

“Bluff? You bet I didn’t! I worked ’em out, every single one of those old exams. Got ’em right too, I guess. What’d I get up for? Fun?”

“Then I don’t see—I like some noise, of course, we get used to it here—but with those horns and the squawkers and ——”

Shorty pulled a longer face than usual. “Concentration, Bobby,” he said solemnly. “Concentration, that’s the game. Let me recommend you to pure, unadulterated concentration! I’m going a-tooting on the fruit of it, with moderation, Bob, with moderation. To-night Ned’s to draw up my schedule of expenses for the month, put down just how

much I can spend on each game and not go broke more'n a week before my next check comes. Drop down and see him do it, won't you?"

"Signal practice," regretted Bob, as the two turned into Stone Hall. "Sorry, for I'd like to watch him squeeze your five-dollar-a-week habits into the limit of five-a-month."

Shorty winked. "We'll have a good time to-morrow at Oak Hill," he said. "Couldn't be so mean as not to treat after the fellows have given me a benefit, could I?"

It may be as well to remark here that though Shorty looked upon its financial success as the best result of that early morning study hour, he could not but acknowledge that it had proved valuable in other ways. The following week his geometry paper returned to him bearing a comment that, when he accidentally discovered it at the end of the last sheet, he had to examine three times before he was quite sure his eyes were telling him the truth. Shorty had not been in the habit of finding such phrases on the papers handed back to him. It was a new experience and rather pleasant for a change. To

study was at times evidently worth while. The fact of its having proved doubly so in this case added to both values in Shorty's eyes.

He and Ned went on the proceeds of the "benefit" to the game at Oak Hill. They paid their carfare out of it, treated their friends who were not on the team to all the popcorn balls and sodas they could eat and drink and bought new megaphones for the occasion, and still the fund was not exhausted. Shorty had insisted on the megaphones. He was a great believer in the bracing power of noise and once at Oak Hill he tuned his own throat and those of his friends and proceeded to show the Oak Hillites that a small delegation of Standham boys was not to be despised even when pitted against a whole school.

"Let her out, fellows!" he adjured his comrades, megaphone in hand. "Limber up your lungs, can't you? Yell as if you expected to walk off with the whole score. One—two—three ——"

"Rickety brax coax coax

Hickety hax coax coax

Standham ! Standham !

What's the matter with Standham ?"

"That's more like it. Now let's take the team. Nine rahs for Gid Sloane! Are you ready? One—two—three——"

"Rah, rah, rah! Rah, rah, rah! Rah, rah, rah! Sloane! Sloane! Sloane!"

So Shorty went on through the list of the eleven.

"Yes, you'd better yell now," shouted an Oak Hillite. "You know you won't get much chance to make a noise during the game!"

This taunt raised a storm of applause from the Oak Hill bleachers.

"Never you mind about us, little boy," thundered Shorty through his megaphone. "You'll have all you can do keeping quiet pretty soon."

Shorty's words were stauncher than his expectations. The truth was Standham did not hope for much from this first game. With stern self-control Gid had spent most of the past month in individual practice. It was only within a week that he had set his men at team work. He hoped to make a good deal of it before Standham's great game with Conway ended the season, but he had deter-

mined to lay his foundations deep and sure. There was to be no reckless haste to put on the finishing touches too soon. Frankly he had warned his men before they left Standham that they were likely to lose this afternoon's game; none the less they must do the best they could.

"We'll play better after a while," finished Gid. "We've not learned all there is to know about football yet and don't you forget it. Don't get discouraged if we're beaten to-day and think it's all up with us forever."

As is often the case the expected did not happen. Standham opened its season with snap and vigor and when time was called after the first half two touchdowns had been chalked to its credit. Shorty and his enthusiastic fellows detected several shades less of certainty in Oak Hill's repeated assertions of what it was going to do to its visitors. On the other hand, the Standhamites' assurance had grown mightily. They whooped for their team with a frantic delight that went far to make up in volume of noise what they lacked in numbers. They shouted out derisive remarks to the Oak Hillites and alto-

gether behaved themselves as excitedly and unfeelingly as people sure of a victory are apt to do. Oak Hill answered gamely. The boys recognized they were getting only what they had been giving a half hour before, but the pretty girls on that side of the field found scant excuse for the enemy's behavior. "How those Standham boys do act!" "I wish they'd lose the game after all, they feel so cocky!" "Maybe our boys will pick up in this next half!"

But Oak Hill did not "pick up" and Shorty, Ned and their thirty fellows came hilariously home with the victors. They marched up from the station to the school escorting the team, who rode in the depot bus, and they stopped outside the principal's house to cheer. They began with Gid because he was the captain, and they took Bob Farrar next because he had made two touchdowns. To the end of the list they declared at the top of their voices just what they thought about every member of the team. They could find nothing the matter with any of them, and as for the team as a whole, every other eleven would better get off the earth at once

and not wait to be wiped off by Standham. To the utmost extent of its lung-power the whole school helped to declare these sentiments. Afterward they all trooped in to supper, hoarse but happy.

A week later the Derry High School came to Standham and proceeded to usurp the field that its supporters had mapped out for the home team.

In spite of all Gid's cautions Standham went into the game with the over-confidence born of its first too-easy victory. Gid made the kick-off, Derry High met it with a return punt and Dudley missed the catch. Before Standham knew what was going on Derry High had the ball on Standham's thirty-yard line. From there she rushed it steadily, surely, irresistibly to a touchdown. The Derry High's captain kicked the goal and after the first five minutes of play the score stood 6 to 0 in favor of the visiting team. Standham was bewildered and the feeling did not sharpen its wits.

The ball was put in play again. Standham got it on her fifteen-yard line, and promptly lost it to Derry High. Gid recaptured it and

kicked on the first down. A Derry High back caught it and being unguarded by the Standham player whose duty it was to look out for him started to run. Bob tackled and brought him down on Standham's forty-yard line. From there Derry High began a rushing game. She advanced the ball to Standham's ten-yard line before that team succeeded in stopping her. Then Pitkin got the ball. In the line-up that followed Gid snapped the ball to quarter and Bob without a second's pause sped it to Buck. The tackle fumbled and the ball rolled gently out of the scrimmage. Bob dashed for it, one of his own team got in his way, and before Standham could block a kick the ball was sailing once more between her goal posts.

As the players took position again upon the field, staunchly from beyond the side lines rang out the slogan of Standham Academy, but no cheers could hearten its men. From the moment of Buck's fumble the eleven as a team went to pieces. Here and there a brilliant individual play blocked for a time the onrush of Derry High, but not all Gid's encouragements and commands, not Pitkin's

dryly humorous appeals to "brace up," or Bob's cool, brainy quickness of generalship, could patch it together again. Panic had entered its ranks, and its members were undeniably "rattled." They disobeyed orders, they misunderstood signals, they fumbled, they played like a squad of unschooled beginners instead of Standham Academy's first eleven.

With the call of time the score stood 24 to 0 in favor of Derry High.

When the second half opened it was a different set of boys that stood up against the visitors. Over-confidence and fear were alike purged from their hearts. Gid, when he once got them to himself, had in some miraculous way restored to them their nerve. He had not scolded, he had not threatened or denounced them. Intermission was no time for that. Quietly, encouragingly, he had talked, reëstablishing his grip over them, turning them back from eleven beaten boys into a team. Now with grim determination they faced Derry High.

Those players, having made up their mind to a walk-over, in their turn experienced a

surprise. They made no more rushes through Standham lines, they found no more fumbles to take advantage of; they were forced almost entirely to defensive tactics. Standham carried the game into the High's own territory and kept it there by sheer pluck. This was good play, it was a splendid recovery of poise, but it came too late to overcome the guests' long lead. Nor could it wipe out for Standham the memory of that first half. At the call of time the beaten team slunk into the gymnasium, ashamed, avoiding each other's eyes and wanting only to get out of the sight of Standham and Derry High alike. There Gid gave it a dressing down its members never forgot.

"We went into that game, gas-bags," he said. "We were so set up over beating Oak Hill we thought nothing could beat us. We expected every fellow that came in our way to fall down and let us walk over him to a touch-down. And when we found a team that stood up against us, we proceeded to get rattled and lose our heads. That's the plain truth. We played like kids, we acted as though we'd never learned the A B C of foot-ball ——"

"Gid," interrupted Buck, "chuck that we. Most of us deserve this, but don't you class yourself in with the rest of us. You were all there the whole time."

"I shall class myself in with the rest of you," said Gid firmly. "I'm captain of this team and I'm responsible for what you do just as much as for what I do myself. There's no separating the captain from the eleven. I shoulder this whole affair to-day; it's up to me in the end. I ought to have fixed it so you couldn't have gone to pieces."

"Oh, come now ——"

"Drop it," commanded Gid. "I wanted to state the facts once; they're past now. Understand? What we've got to do hereafter is to see to it that this afternoon's performance is never repeated. And it's only fair to say right here that I know all of you weren't rattled. Pitkin wasn't and Farrar wasn't. Those two kept their heads, but it takes eleven heads, not two or three or even four, to put up any decent game. Now we'll drop this subject for good. Don't let me hear you talking about it among yourselves even. Remember it only enough to keep you steady another

time. And remember another thing, too. We'll not find many more birds so easy to bag as Oak Hill. This defeat won't do us any harm—if it makes us careful, hard working, strict in our training. It's a bitter pill to swallow, it's a disgrace, but the only thing for us to do is honestly to acknowledge the disgrace and see to it that if we can't win all the games that come after to-day at least we'll go under fighting pluckily, with our wits about us. We won't give other fellows an advantage over us by underrating them and what they can do. By that I don't mean go into a game expecting to get beaten. Expect to win, but don't feel cocksure. Never get blue about a game. Grit will go far to break down another team's advantage, but grit alone won't make a touch-down. Grit's got to be backed up by practice, good, solid hard work. And practice and grit together must rest on loyalty to the school. Our own self-respect isn't enough, our individual desire to play well isn't enough to keep us steady—those didn't save us to-day. Only loyalty to the school can do it when we come to the last ditch. Standham first. Our likings, dislikings,

chances, credit, even this matter of going to pieces—afterward. We can't afford to get rattled for a single second if it is going to hurt the school. That's the price of being on the team. Are you ready to pay it?"

"Yes."

"Aye, aye, captain."

"We'll do it."

"You can trust us now, Gid."

The captain looked keenly around the circle of determined faces.

"I know I can," he said.

CHAPTER V

A RIVAL ON THE SIDE LINES

A DEFEAT, even of the sort that Standham had suffered at the hands of the Derry High School, may sometimes prove better than a victory. Hours of argument on the captain's part could not have convinced the team of what that single game taught it. Gid's loyalty to the boys had made them one in their devotion to him. He had stood by them and they each inwardly resolved that they would stand by him to the last line ; he should never again have cause to shoulder such play as they had put up in the first half of the game with Derry High. There was no more grumbling over hard work, there were no more bickerings over place and position. Petty jealousies gave way before the one great purpose, to live up to Gid's appeal. Indeed on the Monday after that critical Saturday the boys threw themselves into practice with such vim and energy that the second eleven went

down before them like a team of cards. The first fire burned out in time, but it left in its place a steady determination that could be counted on.

Bob Farrar worked as he had never worked before. Every minute that he could squeeze from the required pursuits of a senior-middler's life he made over to the interests of football. He dismissed his studies in the fewest hours possible and spent the rest of the time closeted with Gid Sloane, devising plays and signals. He cut short his ordinary recreation with his friends to tug at weights in the gymnasium and increase his muscle, and in it all Gid seconded him. The Crowd complained that they never saw Bob now except on the grid-iron.

"Have to take Jackstraws' word for it that you're around at all." Shorty would growl to Bob on the rare occasions when he found No. 29 possessed of both its occupants. Or, "Say, who's this?" he would exclaim in great surprise. "Jack, you didn't mention the fact that you were expecting company. Why, it looks—but it can't be of course—it really looks like Bob Farrar!" Shorty with

a grave face would approach Bob and examine him on all sides. Then he would take off his glasses, wipe them carefully and renew his inspection. "I—I'd almost be willing, my friends, to venture the opinion that it is Bob. Risky, I know, likely to ruin my reputation for eyesight, but—here goes. Bob! Ha, he moves, he turns. It is, it is—our long lost Bob!" Here Shorty generally dodged a quick thrust of Bob's arm. Sometimes they clinched and went down together on the rug, an indistinguishable mixture of arms and legs. If Bob came uppermost he helped himself to a seat on Shorty's chest.

"Know me now? Take a good look, Shorty. I don't want you to forget me again."

If Shorty triumphed he held Bob down while he deliberately stared at him. "Those hair, these nose, this eyes," he murmured. "How could I ever for a minute have been uncertain? Let me snapshot them again upon my brain ——"

"Pretty long for a snap shot."

"I should have said a time exposure." Here Shorty let Bob up and took a seat on the table. "If you ever see me by your bed-

side at night, Bobby, don't be afraid. I may some time feel the need of refreshing my memory, you know. Jackstraws tells me that you still sleep here."

Bob laughed and dusted himself off. "We've got to get back our good name and we can't do it by loafing round or sitting still."

"But I tell you just the same," cried Scrap Hayes, "that Gid's workin' you too hard. Look at the pace he's set this week. You can't keep that up through the season!"

"We've got to," said Bob. "It's all for Standham, Scrap."

"Now see here, Bob Farrar, you're not one Gid's aimin' at when he touches off his fireworks about pitchin' in, not bein' lazy, and the rest of it. Some of those fellows need it, need it badly, too, but you did the best work, next to Gid's, done at all in that Derry High game. If you'd had any support——" Scrap paused eloquently.

"Oh, well," said Bob, "work won't hurt me, I guess. See anything will-o'-the-wispish about me, Scrap? I don't look likely to blow away, do I? Never felt more fit in my life.

And we'll do for these chaps Saturday. Where's my sweater? I'm not boasting, just speaking the team's mind, that's all. Sorry to have to leave you fellows, but it's practice time."

Bob was off.

"Hold on!" Shorty slid from the table. "Nothing to hinder our tagging along, I suppose."

The whole roomful adjourned to the athletic field. As they went, a sociable joking group, on the best of terms with each other and the world, Denslow passed then. He was alone, walking rapidly and he gave the slightest of nods as he went by. Bob Farrar, deep in a good-natured war of words with Shorty, did not see him until he was several yards ahead.

"Hello!" he cried. "Isn't that Denslow? When'd he get out?"

"This morning, they say," volunteered Breck. "It's queer," he added to Jack Truman, "that we ever thought Farrar might have a rival in him. Why, Denslow can't come anywhere near him as Farrar's played these last two weeks!"

"He isn't in Bob's class at all," responded

Jack proudly, "not as Bob's marked it out for himself lately."

A teasing light jumped into the eyes behind Shorty's glasses. "Say, Bobby," he drawled, "don't you think you'd better offer Denslow your place on the team? It would be a nice little attention to show our popular friend after his mumpiness. And you know you and he are so well matched—nothing to choose between you ——"

"'Twon't work, Shorty. You can't faze me that way. I guess I'll leave the line-up to Gid a while longer anyhow. See you later." Bob turned off to the gymnasium to get into his playing clothes.

That night after practice he was one of the last to leave the building. Ahead of him strode Denslow. In the stress of the afternoon's work, Bob had found no chance to speak to him. Now he hurried his steps. "Hold on a minute, Denslow," he called.

The boy in front hesitated and finally stopped. Bob caught up with him and held out his hand.

"I say," he said, "it's hard luck, Denslow. I want to tell you I'm honestly sorry. If it

hadn't been for that kiddish mumps you'd be quarterback on the team, most likely, and I'd be playing sub. Of course I don't mean I'm not glad to make the team and I can't help thanking the mumps a bit, but—I am sorry you had to have 'em."

Denslow did not seem to see the offered hand. "Oh, that's all right," he answered curtly. "Don't trouble yourself. As you say, it's my luck, that's all."

He turned into the path that led to Dwight. Bob looked after him curiously.

"Well, 'Bobby, my son,' as Shorty would say," he remarked to himself, "you got the cold shoulder that time sure. I guess he is a bit of an iceberg after all."

Bob shook himself and ran up to his room. He found the study empty and moved by a sudden impulse he threw himself down on the couch, his hands clasped under his head, to think. He had not allowed himself many unoccupied minutes lately. Now he stretched out with a luxurious sense of deliberately being lazy when there were plenty of things he might be busy about. He wondered why Denslow acted as he did. He was a queer

chap. Of course he must have wanted to make the team, any fellow would, and it was hard, ridiculously hard, to have his chances knocked out from under him by an attack of mumps—of all diseases. The kiddishness of it! But why couldn't he take it gamely? Why need he be so grouchy when he found himself definitely in the ranks of the subs? No fellow would stand out for a place that belonged by right of strength to another. Let the best man win. And there was a chance for Denslow yet; the season wasn't over.

Bob searched his heart carefully. Yes, he honestly believed he would not have begrudged his position to Denslow had Denslow earned it, had the mumps not stepped in to handicap him and put him back. He would not have liked to give it up, he would have fought hard, but he could not have endured a position that both he and the school knew belonged to another. Besides he would have felt all the time as though he were handicapping the school, forcing it to play second instead of best. Still, Bob was very thankful that he had not been put to the test. He was glad he had beaten Denslow fairly, for he

knew that his play was good, he knew that he was playing now as he had not dreamed of playing early in the fall.

Quarterback! Hitherto he had lived thoughtlessly in the glow and warmth his position brought him. Now memory deliberately turned the kaleidoscope of the past fortnight and found most of the pictures pleasant to review. Of course there had been the game with Derry High, but so many boys had spoken to him afterward about his own part in it, that his personal recollection of that afternoon was not bitter. Bob acknowledged his weaknesses quicker than his strong points; he owned to himself frankly that he liked to be looked up to by the smaller boys and especially by those of his own age and class. The atmosphere of admiration and of hero-worship that surrounded the football team made pleasant breathing.

About the time that Bob was thinking these thoughts, Pitkin in Gid Sloan's room was talking about Bob.

"Gid," he said, "I'll bank on your judgment after this. Farrar's the stuff that quarterbacks are made of, sure enough. Take

Denslow now, he's a good player, but—I didn't think Farrar had it in him to do the work he's done this last fortnight. Why, if he keeps on as he's begun he'll make a crackerjack in time. Only—I don't want to criticise, you know, Gid—but aren't you laying it on a bit hard sometimes?"

Gid stretched himself out in his chair easily. "The fellows knew what they were let in for; I gave 'em fair warning. 'The boy that has come here for an easy job and a good time may as well get out now as be turned off later.' I told 'em that in September. We've got to work to beat Conway; you know their record this fall."

"The way Farrar's coming on betters our chances, anyhow," said Pitkin.

"To be frank, I'm agreeably disappointed in Bob myself," acknowledged the captain. "Oh, I thought he'd be good, but not quite so good as he's turning out."

Gid leaned forward and rested his elbows on his knees, his chin on his clasped hands.

"The absolute requisite in a quarterback, Pit," he said, "is to think and then to act, but so nearly at once that nobody can count

the time between. That's one of Bob Farrar's strong points. With him to think and to act are almost identical. Then he's got imagination, and that's a big asset for a quarter, an imagination that sees behind the rules of the game to its possibilities. Bob never hesitates. He never seems to weigh the value of two plays. He makes mistakes sometimes, but he makes them less and less often. That's what this hard practice is doing for him, it's training his judgment. He gets at decisions so quickly now that they seem almost intuitive. Maybe they are. Moreover, Bob is cool; he never loses his temper; he's not ruffled by hard knocks or hard words, he's always cheerful. Don't you notice how the boys brighten up when he's around? He won't stand anything gloomy, he keeps 'em up to concert pitch all right. Farrar's not so light and small as most quarters, I know, but he's never tired. His step never drags, his eyes never look dull. That fellow's got a splendid reserve of energy!"

"Don't wear it out, Gid."

"No danger. I guess he can stand the pace."

"You're putting on a good many extras."

"He likes 'em, there isn't a lazy bone in him. Don't worry, Pit."

Silence fell in the room. Soon Pitkin broke it musingly.

"That Denslow's a queer fellow. Odd how he's managed to set all the boys against him. You're going to work him up as Farrar's substitute, I suppose."

"Oh, yes. I'll put him next to all the tricks, in case of emergencies, but we won't expect any use for him."

Through the weeks Denslow sat in his sweater on the substitutes' bench and watched Standham's games with other schools. Twice when the score stood high in Standham's favor, he was called in to play. He acquitted himself well, but the school met his entrance into the game with no applause.

"Bob," demanded the boys later, "what did Gid send you out of the game for this afternoon? You weren't done up."

"Gid played a lot of the subs," returned Bob, "didn't you notice? To give 'em practice, I reckon. Why, at the end there were only half of the regulars on."

"We don't bank much on Denslow even in practice," remarked a senior.

"Oh, well, you don't want him to sit cooling his heels on the bench through game after game, do you? There's nothing pokier. I know Denslow's not very sociable, but for all that he's a good player."

"There's no quarreling with Bob," said one, "and he's bound not to hear a word against Denslow's play. Anyhow it's something to have got him to confess the fellow's not sociable."

Bob joined in the general laugh. But even while they laughed the boys liked his words.

"You can always be sure," one of them said afterward, "that Bob Farrar's not talking behind your back. He's the straightest fellow in school about that. I believe he'd find something decent even in a—a crocodile, and if he couldn't, why, then he'd keep still about him."

So the games went on, once a week at least, sometimes twice, and though Standham did not win them all its team gained a reputation for steadiness that made Gid Sloane proud of

it. This pride he took care not to show the boys. He let them see his confidence, and he let them see, too, as the days passed, how much he counted on the game with Conway, Standham's last contest of the fall.

"If we shouldn't win next week, Gid would be all cut up," said Pitkin one night during a rub-down in the gymnasium.

"What about the rest of the school?" questioned Buck.

"Oh, I know," Pitkin answered, "but Gid's set his heart on it. That Conway game has been his one great goal all the fall."

"Well, I reckon this team won't stop at anything to give it to him," said Dudley.

"Don't talk about not winning," cried Bob Farrar. "It's not on the program, we've got to win."

"That's the talk," approved the boys, vigorously wielding towels.

But Bob's words had been for once more hopeful than his feelings warranted. It was not the old light buoyancy of the earlier weeks of autumn that he carried up through the November darkness to his room. The study was empty and dim and Bob stumbled

over a chair or two as he crossed to switch on the lights. "Whatever is the matter with you, Bob Farrar?" he muttered in bewilderment. Then he clenched his hands. "We've got to win," he repeated.

It was this same week before the great game that the Crowd began to notice something that they had never before seen in Bob Farrar's manner. Shorty Forbes spoke of it first to Jack Truman. Jack appeared to be looking up English history references at a long table in the library and Shorty lounged near with no pretense of business to account for his presence. After half an hour he jogged Jack's elbow.

"Game's up, Jackstraws. Quit shamming. You haven't turned a page for twenty minutes. Come out for a turn around the quad."

"Now," he demanded a moment later, "what's the matter with Bob?"

Jack turned on his companion quickly. "Why do you say that?"

"Because I've noticed something myself. What's your item?" Shorty could be laconic when he chose.

"He doesn't sleep well," admitted Jack.

"You know what a log I am. Last night he woke me up hollering. He thought he was in a game and he was shouting out signals at the top of his lungs."

"Huh! Dreams football, does he? Worse than I thought. I've had an idea lately that he's soaked up a little too much of it. He talks it—thinks it, I'm certain—eats it at training table—Gid ought to forbid football there—now dreams it."

"Bob hasn't seemed just like himself lately," Jack's eyes were gloomy, "but what made you think anything was wrong, Shorty?"

"His temper, Jackstraws. It is getting uncertain. And Bob's temper has always been a castiron, unbreakable affair; a fellow couldn't even chip it till just recently. Anything bothering him?"

"Not that I know of except ——"

"Football?"

Jack nodded.

"What Bob needs is a bat," declared Shorty. "He ought to break his old training and fill up on ice cream and peanuts and sodas and forget that there is such a thing as a pigskin on the globe. Do him good. My, but he ex-

ploded like a firecracker when I suggested it yesterday! Came and begged my pardon afterward. He's got into a regular treadmill of football, and it's as bad as any other mill, not excepting the grind-mill."

"What can we do about it?" demanded Jack.

Shorty shook his head. "Nothing," he said, "except to hold our tongues, and that's the worst of it."

Jack hesitated. "Shorty," he said, "I think Bob's worried about his play. He says he's falling off lately, has to spur himself up to the scratch. Gid spoke to him yesterday and told him he must pick up a bit."

CHAPTER VI

THE BOY WHO COULDN'T RUN

EXCITEMENT ran high at Standham the week of the game with Conway. Football had been a dominant topic all the fall, now it became the one and only subject of talk. The two academies, separated by some twenty miles, had been rivals for years and a contest between them always called out more school feeling than any other athletic event on the calendar.

Early in the week a short, broad-shouldered young man appeared on the Standham campus. He was first noticed at chapel where he carried himself as one not unused to the place. At four o'clock the boys found him on the athletic field talking with Gid Sloane. He watched the line-up and for fifteen minutes critically studied the play that followed. Then he called the captain out of the scrimmage and said a few words in a tone too low for the boys to hear, illustrating his meaning by quick expressive gestures.

"Who is he?" questioned the onlookers at the fence.

"Must be Davenport," volunteered a senior. "Gid said he was coming over to help coach this last week before the game. Used to captain Standham's eleven eight years ago. A crackerjack, they say. Played on the Harvard varsity, too. Why, you've all heard of him."

The boys regarded the short young man with new respect. He had thrown off his coat and was giving the team an object lesson in snapping the ball.

"Whew! Ain't he a corker!" they commented admiringly.

"You're most of you not quite fast enough," Davenport was saying. "Almost is as bad as nowhere near in football. You've got to be quite up to the scratch here."

"Nothing slow about him," grinned the spectators.

"See! He's putting Farrar on to a trick or two!"

"Used to play quarter himself, didn't he?"

So ran the talk on the side lines.

The players scattered to their places and

practice went on. The new coach seemed everywhere at once. A comment here, a word of encouragement there. Now he took a hand himself. His criticisms were keen and trenchantly given, but they stimulated instead of paralyzing the boys. He always managed to substitute something good for any fault he laid bare. Yet taken all in all his words this first day were few. The players felt that he was reading them like open books, but this he continued to do for the most part without disturbing their self-possession.

"Those eyes of his don't miss anything," said Buck to Bob Farrar as they trotted together toward the gymnasium after the run that always finished practice. "After he'd watched my play for five minutes he knew me better than I know myself; he'd added, subtracted, multiplied and divided me and figured out exactly what I amount to. But somehow I didn't mind. I'll bet he's got this team salted down already and knows to a T just what he can make out of us!"

Bob nodded. "There isn't anything he doesn't see," he replied.

In his heart he almost wished there were.

All through practice he had felt the new coach's eyes on him and in spite of his best endeavors he had, he knew, failed to make good. There was nothing very definite that he could single out in his own mind as the ground for this feeling of failure. Once he had fumbled, that was the only bad error, yet Bob knew something had been lacking in all his play. The spirit, the ease, the vitality had gone out of it. He had to strain nerve and muscle to do what he had done so easily even a fortnight earlier, and the effort showed. What was the good of a fellow's will if it played him false when he most needed it? He had relied on it to force himself to his best work and his will had gone back on him. Bob began to distrust himself. He fought this feeling, he understood its danger. If he distrusted himself it would inevitably show in his play, and reliance on its quarter is the corner-stone of team confidence.

Meanwhile the new coach was saying to the captain, "What is the matter with your quarterback, Sloane?"

Gid turned quickly at the words. "You noticed something wrong?"

"Haven't you? Remember I saw him play three weeks ago."

"He's fallen off lately," said Gid, "but—I can't just put my finger on anything and call him down for it. I don't understand the reason either. It must be he's not built of lasting stuff."

Mr. Davenport gave the captain one of his keen glances. Then he said something in a low voice.

"You think so?" cried Gid.

"I know so. It's a pity, a shame. But I'm afraid it's too late to help it now. What about your subs? There's nobody you could put in Farrar's place?"

"Denslow on a pinch. He played quarter on the second—broad-shouldered, well-built chap. He made the second's touch-down, you know."

"Did good work. What's the pinch you speak of?"

"The school wouldn't stand for him. There's a lot of feeling against the fellow. He's new this year, and in the two months he's been here he's succeeded in getting everybody down on him. It's his manner, I reckon, but

I don't know what's behind that. If I undertook to put Denslow in Farrar's place ——" Gid broke off expressively.

"You're not standing out for popularity on this matter, are you, Sloane?"

The captain flushed. "If it was only the school," he said, "I'd explain to Farrar and play Denslow in a minute. But we'd lose sure with a team made up of nine men at odds against one. That's what it would amount to. The boys wouldn't understand it. Oh, if Denslow was the only man possible, if Farrar were put out completely for some cause, they'd be reasonable. They'd bury the hatchet and back him up nobly, but as things stand ——"

"I see," answered the other. "That won't do. You must play Farrar. How long has this been going on?"

"As I think back now he's not been up to the mark for a week at least."

"The mischief's pretty thoroughly done, I'm afraid. What was the gym instructor thinking of not to call your attention to it?"

"He's not much good. I reckon he didn't understand any more than I did. And I

thought I was careful and foresighted!" Gid's tone was sharp with self-disgust.

"Where does Farrar live?" inquired Mr. Davenport. "Near enough to let him go home for a day?"

The captain shook his head. "No,—New York somewhere."

"Then if I were you I'd lay him off to-morrow anyhow. Keep him away from the training-table, too."

"Bob," said Gid the next morning, overtaking the quarterback on his way to chapel, "I'm going to give you a vacation this afternoon. You're a bit tired and you deserve it. Don't come down to the field, go off somewhere, amuse yourself—put in a jolly afternoon outdoors. To-morrow we'll look for you again in your old place."

So it happened that when his afternoon recitations were over Bob Farrar, for the first week-day of the fall, turned his steps away from the athletic ground. His thoughts were not happy as he left the campus and strode across the fields toward the hill beyond. Black Care rode on his shoulder and marshaled all its grimy little imps to dog his

steps and set weights upon his feet. Chagrin and disappointment and a curious indifference possessed him.

At the first opening in the woods that clothed the hill he looked back. Instinctively his eyes sought the football field. The fence was black with boys, in the centre a dark bunch defined the two elevens. Now the bunch broke, a player darted away and the others straggled down the field after him. Bob watched them idly. "After all, what difference does it make?" he remarked to the silent woods. "One of those fellows down there is Denslow, but I don't care. That's the queer thing—I can't seem to care."

He turned listlessly and began to climb the hill. The last stage of autumn coloring overlay the woods. Overhead and around him the sunshine flickered through twinkling pine needles or fell unhindered by bare boughs. Dry leaves shivered on the beeches and oaks, but the maples and birches stood up straight and clean. A leaf carpet, brown and sere, covered the ground and through it here and there rose fern fronds bleached white by frost.

At first Bob had no eyes for these things. Gradually as he climbed higher, his inbred love of the outdoor world asserted itself. He forgot football. The sunshine began to look bright to him and the sky to shine soft and blue; the clear air swept away his gloom. He drew deep breaths of it into his lungs and filled his pockets with chestnuts. As he stooped for them Black Care slid off his shoulder. A whistle came to his lips in the intervals between munching nuts.

At the same time further up on the hill another boy shuffled his feet through the fallen leaves and viewed life as one consistent stretch of gray. He was small even for a fourth classman, but he carried a face several years the senior of his body. The seriousness, the half-wistful maturity of it, agreed oddly with the frail youngness of his build. As he walked he went out of his way to trudge through hollows that the wind had filled with dead leaves. They crackled at his every step and the sound gave him satisfaction. The act of kicking something relieved his mind.

"It is downright mean," he cried aloud. "Why must a fellow grow up a—a chump!

Not to be able to do things like other fellows !
It isn't fair ! ”

The rocky path wound across a little clearing and the boy stopped and gazed down. Below him he could see the buildings of the school he had left. The campus looked small and narrow and almost flat from his point of view, high land and low ran together in one indistinguishable level. The buildings that loomed so big and imposing near at hand, dwarfed by distance, seemed to cuddle among the trees. Between them, here and there, dark specks moved about in twos, threes, or half-dozens. The boy turned his eyes to the field that had claimed Bob Farrar's attention. For a long while he stared at the tiny figures moving over it, running, bunching, scattering. There was a look on his face as of one who has been roughly waked from a pleasant dream.

Then he pulled himself up sharply. “I was crazy, I guess,” he said, “to think that I could do anything like that.”

He forced his eyes to travel slowly over his short figure, to linger on his white hands. “You look like an athlete, don't you ? ” he

asked himself. "Better say grind. That's all you're good for."

He had started to trudge on when a crashing in the underbrush halted him. Bob, thrusting his way through the sweet-fern and sumach thickets, caught sight of the figure above him.

"Hello," he called, always sociable, "hold on a minute."

Recognition of the newcomer's broad shoulders tempered the answering "Hello" with some restraint. A pair of envious eyes watched Bob, tall, clean-limbed, agile, spring up the slope and into the path.

"You're a june, aren't you? What, a ju-mid? That's pretty good for such a youngster. Haven't I seen you somewhere? Oh, now I remember. You were in my squad the first afternoon of football practice. Going up this way? That's jolly. Two is more fun than one any day."

The swinging step fell into line with the younger boy's.

"My name's Farrar—Bob Farrar."

The other forced an answer out of the shyness that had overtaken him. "Mine's Tom Thompson."

"Glad to know you, Thompson. Drop around and see me some time. Twenty nine, Stone."

It was Bob's way to ask boys to "drop around," and he was heartily glad to see all who accepted his easy offhand invitations. They had found this out and so they came.

"Go?" cried one to whom Tom later hesitatingly repeated Bob's words. "Of course you'll go. Farrar means what he says, there's no playing up for a reputation about him. He honestly likes most every fellow in school, sneaks excepted of course, and that's one reason why we like him."

At the moment little Tom hardly dared think himself awake. He gave his arm a furtive pinch to find out. Just to walk beside this boy who was all that he was not and that he longed to be was an honor. And then to be asked to drop into that boy's room, he, Tom Thompson, to be asked as naturally as though he were like other boys—it was almost beyond belief.

Bob Farrar strode on up the stony path, breathing deeply of the bracing November air, and little Tom panted beside him. His

heart beat fast and not alone from his effort to keep up. The admiration born of a first glance weeks before had been bred by many afternoons of sitting on the fence during football practice. But the hero-worship that one boy offers another is a shy unspoken thing. Tom's drove him to bluntness.

"What are you doing up here?" he asked. "They're practicing down there."

Bob looked down at the figure beside him and checked the swiftness of his pace. "I'm not a football fixture," he said. "Did you think I was? I'm let off to-day. And there's nothing like the woods and a climb to banish the blues."

"What have you got to be blue about?" The frank incredulity of the voice robbed the question of curiosity.

"Why not?"

"Why because—because a lot of things. You can play football for one; you're quarterback on the team." The boy's eyes, shining with admiration, looked straight up into Bob's. "If I could play like that, if I could do anything—football or running or jumping or anything at all, as well as you played Saturday ——"

He stopped for lack of words big and fine and suggestive enough with which to finish.

Bob flushed. "I didn't do very well in that game," he said honestly. On his sore thoughts the words fell pleasantly.

"You made the winning touch-down!"

Bob remembered with what desperation he had pulled himself together to do it.

"And all the boys around me jumped up and down and shouted till they were hoarse," persisted the little fellow. "I did too. And I saw some of them hugging each other afterward, they were so excited, you know, and they said there was nobody like you in 19—, and that you'd be captain of the team next year."

The color mounted higher in Bob's cheeks. "They were sort of carried off their feet, you must remember. And boys will say things then —— Like football, do you? Tried it at all since that first day?"

"I? Oh, no, I just look on."

Something in the grimness of the tone made Bob glance at the boy sharply. The characteristic cordiality that had prompted him to easy friendliness changed to a feeling of more par-

ticular interest. This boy was also troubled about something. He noted the white hands and the gloomy look in the eyes.

"Sit down, youngster," he said, "and tell me all about it. Here's a good place." He threw himself down on the leaves.

"Tell—what do you mean?"

"You've got the blues about something. They're much like the measles, just as soon as they come out you'll feel heaps better." Inwardly Bob was amused to hear himself glibly offering advice of this variety just now. "Oh, I know. So fire away."

Tom surveyed the long easy figure stretched out before him. The gray eyes met his with a friendly look that melted his reserve. Almost before he knew it he had begun to talk as he never remembered talking to another boy in his life. The thought came to him, so might he have talked to an older brother had he had a brother. The boy's voice ran on and on in short tense sentences. Now and then Bob put in an understanding word. Tom's eyes, that at first had fixed themselves on the low branch of a pine near by, more and more often traveled to his listener's face

until at last they lingered there, drinking eagerly of a quiet sympathy and comprehension.

"And so they took me abroad, though the doctors didn't hold out much hope. You know I'd never walked since I was five."

"They must have been tough, those years," said Bob soberly.

"They were. I couldn't jump or run or play as other boys did. I could just study and read. At first they kept boys' stories away from me, stories that told of real boys and their lives, their games and all their two-legged fun. But once when I was ten I got hold of a book like that. It was about some schoolboys and how they played and lost and finally played and won. There was football in it and running and high jumping. My, but they were great chaps, those fellows! And after that I made them bring me all the live boys' books they could find. I guess I read a library-full. Before that I hadn't cared much whether I got well or not. I was comfortable enough generally, not much pain about it, people just doing what I wanted and laying themselves out to amuse me. Oh, I had a

pretty easy time. But after I read that book I made up my mind I wanted to do stunts like those boys and I was in a fever to get on my feet. I pestered the life nearly out of people teasing them to tell me how soon I could begin to walk. And they didn't want to tell me I'd never walk any more. So they'd say, 'Pretty soon.' 'Maybe in six months,' and trusted to luck I'd forget about it. And then when I didn't forget they'd say I must be patient, perhaps in another year. A year looked awful long to me then. But I was willing to wait if only I got well in the end.

"When I grew older I made them get me books on sports, rules and advice and technical things, you know, and I studied them harder than I did my history, so I'd know how to go at it when they let me get up. I've beaten in a dozen races on my back. I remember when they told me at last that I'd probably never run in any real ones. Dad did it, mother said she couldn't. I didn't believe him at first and then I told him I wouldn't believe it. I was going to be a real boy and do things like other boys. I told him some day he'd be proud to see how fast

my legs would go, and he must get me well. You see, I just wouldn't let myself think anything else. And so at last, as I said, they took me abroad to a German place. They didn't believe it would do any good when they took me. I was the only one believed it. I was sure I'd begin to walk when I got there. And after a while I did."

Bob put out his hand and the boys gripped silently.

"It took a long time," said Tom, slowly, "a mighty long time. But now you'd never know that I'd spent most of my life on my back except that I'm slim and small and my skin's so white—would you?"

"No," said Bob, "I'd never dream it."

"Well, after that when we came home, nothing would do but I must go to a boys' prep school. Mother wanted me to keep on with tutors, but I'd had 'em too long. And dad said it was time I got among my kind. But he was afraid I'd be disappointed about some things. He talked to me a long while the night before I came away to Standham, told me to keep a stiff upper lip and not to mind too much if I didn't find everything as

I hoped. Athletics didn't make the world, he said.

"And dad was right this time. I went to work, started in at gym, tried all the stunts and I couldn't do a thing. I gave 'em a good fair trial. You ought to see me try to jump!" There was no merriment in his laugh. "It doubles up every fellow near. You see I lost all those years when most boys are learning to do just fairly well and I have to begin farther back than the beginning even, while they put on the finishing touches. Oh, I shall keep at it and maybe by the time I graduate I'll be able to do fairly well myself, as well as the ordinary run of entering boys perhaps." There was a discouraged droop to the corners of Tom's mouth. "That is all I ought to expect, I suppose. Maybe athletics don't make the world, but they color a good share of my world. It's just left for me to be a grind—nothing but a grind."

Bob looked up quickly. "I remember now I've heard of a Thompson who's quite the shark of his class," he said. "That's you, I suppose. Fellows have told me how you shine. That isn't to be despised, Tom, schol-

arship." The boy flushed at the familiar name. "I don't care for digs myself, but I should like to be able to get things into my head a good bit easier than I do. Studying isn't just my strong point."

"I suppose it's always the thing you can't do that you want to do most," ventured Tom philosophically, "and the other way round. Here I find stunts outdoors hard and indoors easy and with you it's just the opposite. You were born to play football."

"Now there you're mightily mistaken. I've worked hard for all I've won, and—and I guess after all I'm a failure. But never mind about that. Why, Thompson, did you think I was born with a spring in my legs? Training and persistence do everything for a fellow."

"Phil said something like that once—my cousin, Philip Dane. He's a runner, broke the record at Yale last year."

"Oh, I say, is he your cousin? Why, I saw that race. It was great, great!"

Bob studied the boy before him with a new attention. His critical eye noted every good and every bad point of the short figure as though he were seeing it for the first time.

"Phil was always a kind of ideal and spur to my ambition," Tom was saying quaintly. "And I never thought but that if I got so I could walk, I could run too."

"Thompson," the words fell slowly, the voice was very serious, "I believe you can. You're wiry, though you're small. You're built like a racer. It isn't always the big chaps that get there. Why didn't I see it before?" excitedly. "You've got the makings of a runner in you. And you've got spunk. What you need is practice. Now see here," Bob's eyes began to sparkle, "let me take you in hand, will you? Of course this week I can't spare much time, but if you'll buckle down to the exercises I tell you, through the winter we'll work and who says I can't have you in running shape by spring field day?"

"Oh," gasped Tom, "you can't—but would you? Could I? Do you really think ——"

"Yes," said Bob, "I do."

It was dark when they reached the campus. As Bob cut across the quadrangle to Stone he gave himself a short sharp lecture.

"He thinks you're a lot of things you're

not, but anyhow, Bob Farrar, you know enough to put that little codger on to a stunt or two, I guess. And as for this football business, don't let me hear any fussing or fuming or don't-caring from you again! That little chap's grit clear through, solid grit. Do you stand up and take what's coming to you like a man. Go ahead through this week the best you can, the best, mind you—not with any such second rate performance as you've been putting up lately. And then if your best isn't good enough for Standham, why, no fellow'll feel worse about it than you will. But get a grip on your spunk and don't let go!"

Sitting on the study floor he found Jack, scissors in hand, paste pot beside him. Stiff folds of purple cloth covered his knees and scraps of white felt floated down on the purple under the reckless slash of the shears. Jack was cutting out letters for a new Standham banner he intended to sport on Saturday.

"Have a good tramp?" he inquired.

"Fine! Met a little chap named Thompson on the hill. Know him?"

But Jack's attention was not to be called

off from a matter which had been uppermost in his mind for ten minutes. "Bob," he broke out, "what does Denslow want of you?"

"Denslow! Why, nothing of course. What do you mean, Jack?"

"He was here a little while ago asking for you."

CHAPTER VII

ON THE EVE OF THE GAME

THAT night Bob slept without a dream and woke fresher than he had felt for days. His momentary wonder as to the cause of Denslow's visit had entirely slipped from his mind. The fact of the call itself he had forgotten in the heat of other excitements. The Crowd had an old-fashioned pillow fight the night before and the study still bore testimony to vigorous battle. Their most cherished specimens Bob and Jack had consigned to the bedroom early in the fight, but the larger part of the cushions with which the study was furnished had been constructed for active use as well as for passive and they had nobly borne the brunt of conflict.

Still Bob, surveying from the middle of the room the scene of last night's battle, could paraphrase Tennyson —

“ Pillows to right of him,
Pillows to left of him,
Pillows in front of him
Spilled out their feathers.”

"See here, Jackstraws, this is a pretty mess." He put out an arm and gathered in four cushions that were sprawling on the study table. One was strong and whole, the next showed a wide split in its outer covering, the third's wound had gone deeper, a small white snow-storm followed Bob's vigorous shake. On the last there was a stain, big, black, wet, repeated on the blotter that had lain beneath it.

Jack tore off a dry corner and began to sop up the ink. "I knew some day those fellows would upset the bottle," he said.

Bob carried the pillow to the window and propped it in the sun to dry further. Then he took a turn around the room collecting from chairs, corners and under furniture the other munitions of the late war. Only the couch and window seat had none to offer him. The sound and slightly damaged he returned to their accustomed places, the others he stuffed into a closet.

"Some day, Jackstraws," he said, "you and I will have to get out our kit and take a few stitches, unless you can corral an aunt or a cousin to do it for us."

The hill tramp and the pillow fight, mark-

ing as they did a complete interruption of football thought and practice, had done Bob good. That afternoon he buckled on his pads with something of his former eagerness. Gid, coming by, noted the whistle on his lips and his heart lightened.

"How'd it go yesterday?" Bob asked Buck as he pulled on his sweater.

"Oh, well enough, but Denslow's not you, Bob. Though he's a good enough player," Buck added honestly.

Practice was fast and snappy. Bob found it taxed all his powers to keep the ball in play, but it did not overtax them. His rested mind returned to its duties with renewed interest. The distaste for his position that had so bewildered him lately seemed gone, Bob hoped, forever. A quiet word or two from Davenport cheered him still further. The graduate coach's wide experience and common sense stood the team in good stead this last week of its season. He rushed the boys hard while they were on the field, but he knew when to stop. After he had taught a lesson he left a player to digest it gradually, he did not keep him tackling or hurdling or

bucking until the spirit had gone out of him.

"I wish you had come over sooner," Gid said to him that night when captain and coach had finished laying out the plans for the next day's practice.

"I wish I had, Sloane, for a day or two at least. Just the same you have done wonders with these boys. I can understand that when you started in there didn't look to be much material to work upon, nothing out of the ordinary. You tell me Farrar came to the front when the season was well begun. With that one exception you've got as fit a team now as a captain could ask for. It might get away a little quicker, the defense is a bit weak in spots, but we're trying to remedy that. Your ends are fairly swift. Altogether if Farrar were back where he was two weeks ago, while I'd not be willing to prophesy a victory, I should say your chances of winning Saturday were good. Conway has the heavier team, that's a point in their favor. They've swept everything before them so easily this season that they're likely to feel pretty confident of walking off with the score this week—

that's a point against them, but it won't do to build on."

"You think Farrar still below par?" asked Gid anxiously. "He played better to-day than he has for a week."

"Certainly. Yesterday's lay-off did him good. I'd advise you to keep him out till Thursday or even Friday, if it could be done, Sloane. I see it can't. He might grow a trifle rusty, but that wouldn't matter. By keeping his muscles in trim through brisk walking every day, an afternoon would serve to polish him up on plays. He could come into signal practice if he'd promise to keep his mind off it between times. But it can't be done, the team would lose some of that splendid solidarity it has, and that's its long suit. I discovered that yesterday when Denslow played in Farrar's place. It was well enough for a day, as you said yourself in case of necessity the boys might put up a good fight on Saturday with him at quarter, but three days of such practice beforehand would break up the eleven. No, we must keep Farrar in."

"You look for him to slump again?"

"He can't help it. He'll be doing his best, remember that. There's no laziness in Farrar. This bit of change he's had will smarten him up for a day or two, but the mischief's done."

Mr. Davenport's words came true. Bob finished Wednesday's practice, listless and tired. As he pounded around the running track, his feet dragged and his heart was heavy. It had come back again after all! In his brain rose the memory of a treadmill he had once seen. How ceaselessly the wooden steps had passed under the horse's hoofs! How doggedly the beast had tramped and tramped and made no ending! Bob felt as he remembered that horse had looked. His treadmill of sport yielded him no more interest or variety. Then he thought of Tom Thompson. "Don't you forget that little chap's spunk, Bob Farrar!" He squared his shoulders and pounded on. By the time he reached the gymnasium he was able to join almost as usual in the hubbub of joke and comment.

Thursday brought no change for the better. In vain Bob strained after his old snap and

vigor. The odd thing about it all, to his mind, was that he escaped a dressing down from captain and coach. He fully expected one and he knew his play deserved it. Instead they were uniformly kind. This kindness galled Bob more than any number of lectures would have done. When he saw Denslow plunge eagerly into the play, envy of his strength and self-command would grip him. Every time the captain came toward him he waited for the words that would put him on the substitutes' bench and set Denslow in his place, but they were not spoken.

On Friday Gid called the players together before they left the gymnasium. Struggling into coats and vests they crowded around him. "Fellows," he said, "I'm not going to talk much to-night. I reckon I don't need to. We all know what we're in for to-morrow and we're going to put up the game of our lives. I can trust every one of you to do your best and that's all Standham asks of any of us. Here's something I want you to do for me—Don't worry. Whatever you do or don't do to-night, don't worry. Keep your thoughts off to-morrow as much as you

can, go to bed early, sleep well. That's all, unless Mr. Davenport has a word for us." The captain turned to the coach.

"There isn't much left for me to say," remarked the short young man. "Your captain has given you the best advice there is, and I can't better the best. Standham has a team to be proud of and I congratulate every one of you, regulars and substitutes alike. But I will say this. Whatever else you forget to-morrow, boys, don't forget to grin. 'The smile that won't come off' belongs as much to the uniform of a football player as does his knee pad ; it is part of his protective armor. I shall look for it to-morrow, whether the game comes to us or not. Don't let me see any one of you on the field not quite dressed."

Laughter greeted Mr. Davenport's last remark. The tension of excitement relaxed and the boys tied cravats and buttoned collars with cooler fingers. At the door they found the captain waiting. He had a cheery word for each player as he passed. Bob could not meet Gid's eye but he felt the captain's hand fall on his shoulder for a moment. "Good-night, Farrar. We know we can count on

you for Standham." He hurried on into the darkness.

Restlessness fell on Bob at supper. He left the table as soon as he could and went up to his room. He did not stay there long. A mass-meeting of the school had been called on the steps of Centre Hall. There were to be speeches, cheers for the team; it would be a hot-bed of football enthusiasm. Carefully Bob kept out of the way of his friends until the meeting had begun. He was in no mood for glorification to-night. When the distant sound of cheers floated across the campus, he pulled his cap well down over his face, and strolled over to the outer edge of the crowd. Inside, Centre Hall was brilliantly lighted. Two locomotive headlights served for illumination outdoors and their glare shone on the steps. At the top stood Gid Sloane, making a speech that was punctuated every little while by cheers. His words reached Bob clearly.

"We'll do our best," Gid was saying. "You can count on us for that. And we'll do it not for our own sakes but for Standham's. I've said we will do it, maybe I

ought to have said we have done it. For victory or defeat doesn't lie with to-morrow. It lies with yesterday and last week and all the weeks before that. Through the fall we have been getting ready for this game. We have worked hard. To-morrow comes the test of our work. It can't change what we have done. It can only show to you and to Conway what that work has been. Every hour of practice that we have put in these last two months will come out. I said you could count on us to do our best to-morrow, because for nine weeks we have been doing it. I don't say we haven't made blunders. We have—and probably we'll make some to-morrow. But anyhow we'll just keep on doing our best. We promise you that.

“If we win, remember it isn't just the team that does it. Every sub that squats on the sidelines has a share in victory. It is his work as well as that of every first-eleven man that has made it possible. We haven't left him out of the drudgery, don't you leave him out of the glory—if there is any.

“And if we lose—but we won't talk about that. We've tried by steady practice to fix it

so we can't lose. And you've tried to fix it so we can't lose by your confidence in us. We thank you for it. We'll make you proud of us if we can; we'll keep you from being ashamed of us anyhow."

A yell of applause broke out as the captain stepped down from his place. Three or four seniors seized him and setting him on their shoulders lifted him high above the boys on the stairs. A short muscular fellow sprang to the top step and waved his arms wildly.

"Here, boys," he bawled, "come on! All together now! Holler! One—two—three ——

"Rickety brax coax coax

Hickety hax coax coax

Sloane! Sloane!

What's the matter with S-L-O-A-N-E!"

The cheer cut the night air sharply, the shrill treble of the little boys sounding above the low-pitched huskiness of the older voices. Over and over they repeated it. At one side some one touched off a box of red fire. It threw the crowd into sharp relief. On the steps the leader's arms rose and fell as he timed the cheer and the heaving shoulders of

the boys below answered him rhythmically. Their faces, illumined by the red glare, stood out clearly, each stamped with a great intensity shot through with a frenzy of excitement.

"Sloane! S-L-O-A-N-E! S-L-O-A-N-E!" they yelled.

At last with scattering shouts they stopped breathless. His bearers let Gid down reluctantly. The president of the athletic association, a tall senior, leaped to the step below the leader of the cheering.

"Fellows," he yelled, "this is just to give the boys a taste of the kind of support we've got ready for 'em to-morrow. We want to let 'em see how we feel about 'em. We want each one of 'em to know that behind him stands the school—the whole of it. Standham's got a cheer for every one of her eleven, subs too. Let's show 'em a sample right now."

"Yi—yi—yi——!" High and undisciplined rang the school's approval of this course of action.

The short muscular boy came down a step and ranged himself beside the athletic association's president. His voice boomed out

to the limits of the crowd, husky, dominant. His shoulders rose and fell again in time with his deep panting breaths. "Now then—give 'em each a send-off! What's the matter with Pitkin?"

With no uncertain note bellowed the answer: "He's all right!"

"Who's all right?"

"P-I-T-K-I-N!"

"Rah! Rah! Rah! Pitkin! P-I-T-K-I-N! P-I-T-K-I-N!"

The air quivered under the shock of sound. Somebody touched off more red fire, then green, then purple. Bob Farrar moved away beyond range of the light and leaned up against a tree.

"Farrar! F-A-R-R-A-R! F-A-R-R-A-R!" The name on his comrades' lips rang hollow in his ears. "They wouldn't do it if they knew," he muttered. "I don't deserve it."

He kept his place as the yelling went on.

"Now for the subs," bellowed the tall president. "Cheer your best, boys, for the men behind the guns! Remember what Sloane said about them. (Who first?)" he whispered to Gid.

The captain hesitated an instant. "King," he answered in an undertone.

The president passed the name to the boy beside him and he shouted it to the crowd. The boys fastened on it with a will. King was a pleasant fellow, well liked, and Standham enjoyed yelling for him. The subs should at least have a share in the noise to-night whether they got a chance at the morrow's play or not.

"Brigham!"

The name bruited in this fashion on the night air sounded sweet in its owner's ears.

"Denslow!"

The yellers balked at the name, hesitated, caught it up undecidedly. Then the voice of the leader on the steps swept in other voices and carried them along, drowning out an incipient hiss that had started in some quarter. A half-hearted cheer, perfunctory; there was no life in it.

"Bates!" The shout gained volume again.

Bob Farrar slipped from his station under the tree and walked away. His heart throbbed with hot sympathy for the boy whose standing in school had been thus publicly and

ruthlessly exposed in the hearing of all Standham. Bob wondered whether Denslow had been present in the crowd. He might not be popular, but such an experience as that surely was not quite fair. "And he ought by rights to have my place," he said to himself.

The thing that had been gathering force in his mind all the week, the conviction that he had at last shaped in words, claimed a hearing. If you think so, what are you going to do about it? something inside him demanded. Go on to-morrow and play with the team? Hang on to a position that you've lost the right to?

But, argued Bob's pride, have I lost the right to it? Why doesn't Gid put me off then? He said that first night of the term that he should if he found any better player for quarter.

Now you're juggling with words, declared his sense of fairness. You've fallen off lately and you know it; you can't keep the boys up to the mark as you did a while ago. You've felt it all along, you're sure of it this minute, you acknowledged it a jiffy ago. Bob Farrar, you think this thing through to a finish and

while you're thinking don't forget what Gid said after that game with Derry High. "Training and grit must rest on loyalty to the school," he said. "Standham first, ourselves afterward. That's the price of being on the team." Have you paid it? Isn't the bill just coming to you now, maybe? What if it's the price of victory over Conway? The fellows will stand by you, they'll not blame you, they'll take whatever you do to-morrow and make the best of it because they're prejudiced against Denslow. But what about yourself? Are you going to hoist on to your wretched pride and desire to play in the biggest game of the season the burden of—defeat, maybe? That's a fine way of putting Standham first, Bob Farrar!

So Bob fought out his battle. It was not easy. At the end of an hour he started for Stone Hall.

The captain was just coming out of his room when Bob reached the door. He turned back at his quarter's request for a minute's talk.

"Gid," Bob began abruptly, "you mustn't feel bound to keep me on the team if you think any one else better for my place."

Gid looked at him keenly. "Why do you say that?" he asked. "Losing heart?"

"No." Bob flushed. "If you put me on to-morrow I'll play for all there is in me, but I'm afraid it isn't much. I know I'm not up to the scratch lately, Gid."

"Who had you thought of for your position?"

"How about Denslow?"

"I can't trust him, Bob. Frankly, if I could I should play him for quarter to-morrow. Oh, I don't refer to his play, that's good enough and steady as a clock. I mean I don't know where he stands and I can't find anybody who does. The school hasn't any use for him—did you hear that feeble cheer to-night? It ought not to have happened, his name ought never to have come up like that, but what could we do? It would have been bad to leave him out altogether, maybe it was worse to put him in. How do I know but he's the sort that would take the chance to-morrow, if I played him, to pay the school back for an affront like that? It was a nasty experience, Farrar. We can't blame Denslow if he hates Stand-

ham and all Standhamites after this! You see now why I don't dare use him. I can't trust his loyalty."

From the captain's room Bob walked slowly up-stairs. So deep in thought was he that until he was fairly upon him he did not notice a boy at the door of his own study. Then the boy turned and he saw that it was Denslow. Surprise held Bob silent for an instant, but he rallied quickly.

"Nobody home?"

He threw open the door but Denslow drew back. "I just wanted to see you a minute." His manner showed embarrassment. "I came the other night and didn't find you."

Bob nodded and walked into the study. "Oh, come in," he said. "It's just as easy to talk in here as out in the hall; more comfortable, too."

Denslow hesitated. Then he stepped over the threshold and shut the door behind him.

CHAPTER VIII

DENSLOW EXPLAINS

BOB threw himself down in one of the big leather chairs and motioned Denslow to another. "Have a seat," he said hospitably.

The other boy seemed to ignore the invitation. He stood, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, just inside the door. "See here, I was rude that time a while ago." The words came grudgingly, not so much as though the speaker wanted to apologize as that he had made up his mind to do it. "I've been ashamed of myself ever since. Truth is, I was out of sorts. No, I can't sit down, thank you."

Bewilderment overspread Bob's face. He was not wont to harbor a grudge and his memory for snubs was short. "I don't know what you're talking about, Denslow."

"It happened that day I got out of sick ward—after the mumps."

Recollection stirred vaguely in Bob's brain.

"Oh, well, that's all right, whatever it was. I didn't lay it up against you. What's your hurry?"

Denslow put his hand on the door knob. "Just came to beg your pardon."

"Well, you don't need to light out in such a rush, whatever you came for."

The knob turned.

"Hold on," cried Bob. "Stop a minute, can't you? I say, what makes you so cranky anyway? Don't you want to know any of us?"

The other flushed. His was a clean cut, proud face whose sullen look seemed not so much habitual as of recent imprint. "That isn't the question. It's whether you want to know me."

"You don't give us a chance. Who's going to keep on troubling a fellow that shuts up like a clam whenever anybody goes near him?"

"You only came out of curiosity."

"If you call it curiosity," cried Bob, "that makes fellows ready to get acquainted with strangers, you're welcome to your word. The boys are willing enough to be friends with a

new chap. We're not very cut and dried here at Standham. 19— was quite keen about you, for instance, until you made it plain you didn't care a snap for us. A fellow's got to meet people half-way, Denslow. You didn't come so much as a foot."

"Just the same," said Denslow, "if you hadn't all known that I'd been expelled——"

"Expelled! What are you talking about?"

"You needn't pretend it's any news, Bob Farrar. You and all the rest of this school know about it, you've known about it from the very first day of the term. It was then Shorty Forbes tried to quiz me about it——"

Something in Bob's face checked him. "Haven't you? Don't you?" he asked.

"No," said Bob, "I haven't and I don't and what's more I don't know of a fellow who does. I guess your imagination's been pretty lively. Sit down in that chair and tell me the row—that is, if you care to. It won't go any further unless you say so."

Denslow still refused the chair. "No, I'll stand. You see, it was this way. I got into a scrape in the school where I was last year. Something pretty bad happened, a mean

business, you know, of the sort no decent fellow would have a hand in. I'm not a prude, but I don't go in for the kind of thing this was. I'd been called down two or three times before during the year and they wanted a scapegoat, so they loaded it all on to me. Expelled me. It made me mad. The expelling I didn't mind so much as their thinking I'd do that kind of a low down dirty trick. Of course it hit my folks fairly hard. After a while the school authorities found out the truth and asked me to come back and tried to set me right again. I wouldn't go, I came here instead. They'd claimed to keep the whole thing in the school but it had leaked out more or less and though they tried to be thoroughgoing about clearing up my reputation, the false report went a good deal further than the truth ever did. And when I came here and Forbes quizzed me about how I liked my last school and other boys made remarks too I found double meanings in 'em all. I thought you fellows knew and blamed me and were putting up a game on me, only pretending to want to be friends just to see what I'd do—for the sake of snubbing me afterward,

maybe. So I made up my mind I wouldn't give you the chance. I was pretty touchy and sore. Honest, didn't you know?"

Bob shook his head.

"I guess I've been a chump then. I get so mad sometimes I make up my mind to cut it all, go to sea maybe, anywhere to get away from everybody who's ever heard of me before. And then I get sullen—pretty disposition, isn't it?—and say I don't care a rap what fellows think and that I'll stick it out all by myself till Doomsday. But I know all the while it's not true. I do care. Why, I get so hungry sometimes just to have boys around me, near me, to be in the midst of them, that I go into the library where they're working and pretend to study something! But none of them are friends of mine, oh, no. They don't have anything to say to me. That's why I worked so hard to make the team. I thought maybe in the games I could do something that would go toward making you forget. You know how fellows feel toward a chap that wins something for their school. Oh, well," he made a quick gesture of dismissal, "that's all. Never mind. I guess I've turned

myself inside out pretty thoroughly, but I know you won't blab. Good luck to you in the game!"

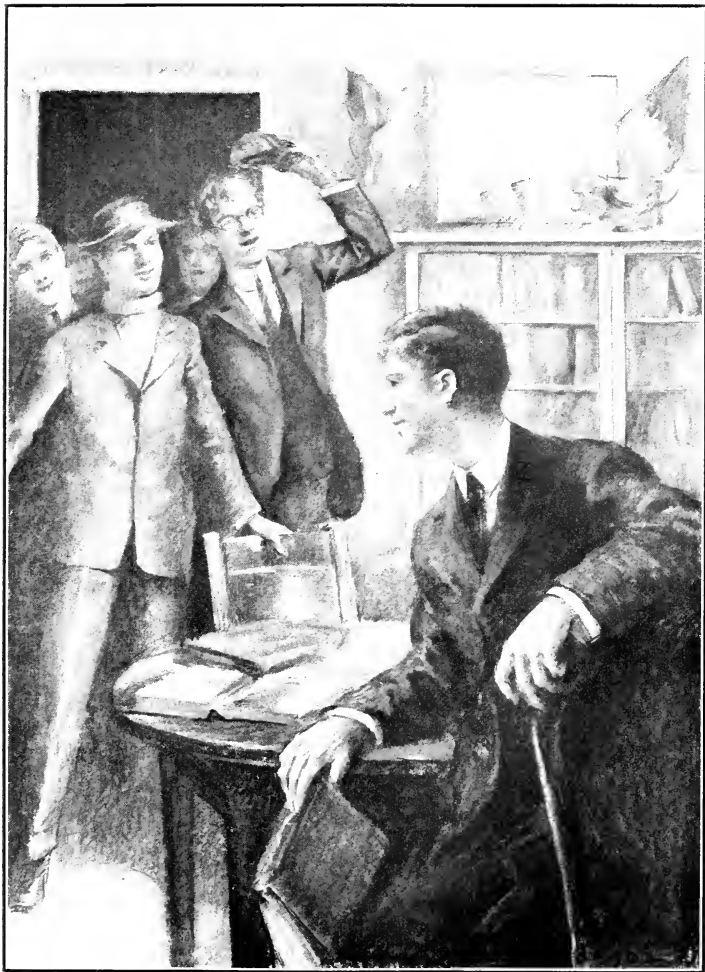
He went out abruptly and shut the door. Bob sat quite still.

The clock among the silver cups struck once. Half-past nine. From across the campus sounded a refrain strongly rhythmical, it penetrated faintly to Bob's ears. He stirred uneasily and his glance fell upon a book sprawling open under the table. He righted it.

"Quo usque abutere, Catilina, patientia nostra? Quam diu furor iste tuus nos eludet? Quem ad finem sese effrenata jactabit audacia?"

In the privacy of his own feelings Bob had of late often substituted Conway for Catiline. Then Cicero's invective, though not made more intelligible, became at least more forceful. The analogy limped badly, Bob did not attempt to press it too far; but at any rate it gave him a fellow-feeling for the Latin orator.

He put out an uncertain hand in the direction of the dictionary. Not that he



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really felt inclined to study, he only felt less inclined to other pursuits. Outside the song, shouted rather than sung, came nearer. Bob drew back his hand from the dictionary, closed the Cicero and shoved it into the book-case. The refrain entered the dormitory, rollicking, triumphant, joyous, and beat its way up the stairs. Bob distinguished the words now.

“Watch the Conway yaller-jackets tuggin’ at the
score,
See ’em sweat ’n’ fight ’n’ fret to lift it up some more.
We’ve got ’em on the hip-HOORAY! We’ll let ’em
know before
That we’ve come for vict’ry to Conway!

“We’ve got a yell for Pitkin, three-times-three for
Captain Sloane!
Our quarterback’s a corker, just watch him make
’em bone!
The yaller-backs ’ll see some play, so wait ’n’ hear
’em groan
‘Go back with your vict’ry to STANDHAM!’”

The crowd burst into the study.

“Here he is,” cried Jack. “Where’ve you kept yourself, Bob? We hunted everywhere for you after supper.”

"Where've you been yourselves since the meeting?" Bob asked.

"Oh, working off steam," said Hunt.

"Loafing round, talking, singing some," Spud added.

"'So hand us out a vict'ry quick'—that's the way another verse begins," put in Scrap. "Ain't it a dandy, that song!"

"Altogether," finished Shorty, "we've been disporting ourselves as candidates for victory should. Here's to We, Us and Company tomorrow!"

The boys gave vent to a yell that though a trifle hoarse showed the fine edge of their energy to be as yet unblunted.

"Where'd you disappear to, Bob?" persisted Ned.

"Oh, Bob's a pilgrim and Bob's a stranger," croaked Shorty, dropping down on the couch. "So saith the her-book."

"What you talking about?" demanded the literal-minded Scrap.

"Never seen or heard of a her-book, Scrap?" asked Shorty.

"Never."

"Cross your heart and bob your heels?"

"Cross my heart. What's that other? Some more Massachusetts talk like sayin' doughnuts when a fellow means crullers, 'n' callin' flapjacks, griddlecakes?"

"You'll come a close shave if you call it Shorty-talk, Scrap," volunteered Jack.

"And Scrap's never seen a her-book," drawled Shorty mournfully. "I'll have to report you to the Prin for cutting chapel, Scrap."

"I haven't—not more'n four times this whole term! But what's that got to do with it?"

"Change the gender and see," suggested Ned.

Scrap obeyed. "Her-book—oh!" He caught up the nearest throwable thing, which happened to be an orange, and hurled it at Shorty's head. Shorty ducked and the orange struck the wall behind him. At its impact the rind burst and the yellow juice trickled down the plaster.

Shorty captured the orange. "Thanks—much obliged to you for cutting it for me, Scrap." Imperturbably he applied his lips to the juicy rents. "N. B. To prepare oranges

for eating : sling 'em at a wall. Good for the oranges, not so good for the wall. Say, Bob and Jack, when it gets dry you'll have a spot of color over here. Nice thing, color—gives variety."

"I'm awful sorry, boys," apologized the dismayed Scrap. "Don't you s'pose it'll wash out?"

"Let's see you try it," suggested Ned Hensley.

Shorty waved an arm dramatically. "Enter Scrap into the ranks of the scrub-ladies, the three graces that preside over the soap and suds of Standham! If you make a good job of this place, I'll give you a show at the regions beneath."

"Risky, risky!" cried several voices.

"Oh, I'll oversee the job myself." Shorty shied his orange peel into the waste-basket.

On the eve of an athletic event of the first importance the boys' attention could not be expected to stray far from the coming game. The talk returned to the vicinity of football.

"Denslow caught it to-night, didn't he?" Ned remarked. "That yell couldn't walk alone."

"It was sort of mean, too—before the whole school," said Spud.

"Well, what could you expect?" asked Hunt. "The fellow has only himself to blame."

"D'you s'pose he minded?" Scrap inquired.

"No." Hunt was emphatic. "Pride hurt probably, that's all. What does he care how the school feels about him?"

"It sounded bad anyhow," said Jack.

"Boys," said Bob, breaking in on the general comment, "if Denslow plays to-morrow, yell for him good and hard, won't you?"

"What should he play for?" inquired Spud.

"Why, Bob?" asked Ned. "None of us like him."

"Oh, come off! That's a little too much," growled Hunt.

But Bob stood his ground. "There's every likelihood of his playing. Denslow is the best sub we have got, he may go in before the first half's over. And do you want Conway to hear such a weak noise as you managed to get out to-night? If Denslow plays he'll be

playing for Standham, representing you, and you ought to support him."

"We'll yell our heads off if you say so, Bob," said Scrap, "though it won't mean that we like the fellow."

"Give him a ripper for once," urged Bob. "It'll do him good. If you start it the rest will chip in."

"All right," the boys agreed. "If Denslow's called in we'll give him the send-off of his life. You wait and hear us."

Shorty glanced at the clock. "It's our little Bobby's bedtime. Scuttle, fellows. Early to bed and later to rise makes a team brawny and brainy old guys. Mother Goose improved while you wait. We're off, unless you'd like to have us stay and put you to bed."

Bob declined the offer with thanks.

Shorty picked up the fragments of orange peel that had fallen short of the basket. "Chalk a long mark to my credit for that."

The other members of the Crowd were already clattering down the corridor. Shorty gave Bob a hearty slap on the back as he followed them to the door. "Good luck, Bobby," he said. "Good-night."

CHAPTER IX

STANDHAM VS. CONWAY

STONE HALL was very empty and very quiet. In these respects it represented the whole campus. Only one place showed much sign of active boy life, and that was the vicinity of the bulletin board at Centre Hall. There returns from the game were posted and a crowd about it greeted each new item with cheers or groans, according as it made for Standham or against. In the intervals between reports restlessness claimed the waiting boys. They discussed what had been gained or lost and hazarded guesses as to what was going forward at the minute. Every now and then they relieved their feelings by rehearsing Standham's collection of yells or shouting out her football songs. The volume of noise they made bore no proportion to their number, for that was comparatively small. Every Standham boy who could rake or scrape together the money, or whom a

perverse fate did not chain to the academy, had gone to Conway to cheer the Standham eleven on to victory. Every boy, that is, with two exceptions.

In the third-floor study at Stone Bob Farrar sat, his right leg extended stiff and straight on a chair in front of him. Between Bob and the door Tom Thompson gravitated excitedly. At intervals a boy fresh from the bulletin board clattered up the stairs and into the room.

"How are you, Farrar? My, but it's the meanest shame for you to be cooped up here! Say, they've got the ball on our thirty-yard line. Great snakes, I wish you were over there!"

"Denslow's doing pretty good work," suggested Bob.

"We've held 'em to one touch-down so far," said the visitor. "That's better'n two or three."

"It's first-rate, seems to me, when Conway has such a heavy team. How's the line standing up against 'em now?"

"Fighting every inch, so the fellows say. I tell you they keep the wire hot."

Another step sounded on the stairs. "They broke through our line!" gasped the newcomer.

"For how much?" cried Bob.

"Twenty yards."

Bob groaned.

"We're done for," wailed the first arrival.

"We're beaten sure."

The second nodded gloomily.

"No such thing," declared Bob. "We can make up —— What's that?"

Tom made for the window and threw up the sash. A faint sound entered, the distant mingling of voices, but whether in exultation or dismay the boys could not tell.

The two visitors sprang to their feet and dashed for the stairs, shouting wild promises of speedy return.

"Hustle, Tom," cried Bob, "or I'll go crazy before you get back!"

Little Tom sped after the others. Bob, left alone, nervously clenched his hands and waited. Again footsteps beat on his ears, far away at first, coming swiftly nearer, until they pounded the concrete under his window. It could not be Tom; he had not had time to go

and return. The door had been left open by the others in their flight. Bob leaned forward and strained his eyes toward the stairs. "A safety!" shouted the newsbringer as he made the landing. He shot into the room and dropped panting on the couch. "We—had to do it—keep 'em from—a touch-down. They'd have made one sure."

"Eight to nothing then," said Bob.

"Oh, Farrar," groaned the other, "why'd you have to turn your old ankle? To-day of all days in the year!"

Bob stirred uneasily. "We might be worse off now if I was there." He tried to speak lightly. "The game isn't over. Teams have often made up a lead of more than eight points."

The boy on the couch was not to be thus easily encouraged. "If it was anybody but Denslow at quarter, we might have some show of doing it! But what does Denslow care who wins? He's not one of us, Standham doesn't matter to him."

"Now there I'll bet you're wrong," cried Bob. "I'll eat my hat if Denslow hasn't as big a stake in this game as—as Gid himself."

He'd play his fingers off to whip Conway—any fellow would."

"Well, if he could ——" the other sat up and thumped the couch vigorously by way of emphasis. "If Denslow could manage to draw a victory out of this, why, if he could play the team up to a tie even, I tell you, Bob Farrar, there wouldn't be anything this school would think too good for him! He could have us, every one, as queer a fish as ——"

The noise of far away cheering invaded the study. There was no mistake about it this time, the shout was one of jubilation. Little Tom panted up the stairs, his eyes shone with excitement, his old-young face was stirred into boyishness.

"It's ours," he gasped, "our ball—on their—twenty-five yard line. Buck made—the kick—and Conway got the ball. They started a run—Sloane tackled—their end fumbled. In the scrimmage Denslow worked a quarter-back run for forty yards!"

"Hooray!" yelled the boy on the couch. "Say, now, there'll be a fight! Bye, Farrar."

Bob's face was pale with excitement. He held himself down in his chair with difficulty.

"Just twenty-five yards to gain! We've got to do it—we've got to! Tom, hand me those crutches."

"What for?"

"I'm going up to Centre. I can't stand this."

"Oh, you mustn't! Honest, you mustn't. Please, Bob Farrar. You said you'd stay right in that chair, if I'd keep you posted how the game went."

"Well, I was rash. I thought I wanted to stay down here, but I don't any longer. Are you going to hand me those crutches?"

"No."

"Then I'll get them myself."

"You promised."

Bob's eyes held little Tom's for a long minute, then he settled back in his chair. "Bother! So I did. Oh well, run along, youngster, and when there's something to tell come back as fast as you can."

Bob, left alone again, hung on to his patience with both hands. Denslow had made good; it remained only to turn that run to account on the score. Could the team do it? In an agony of anxiety Bob strained his ears

to catch some hint from the crowd at Centre Hall that might indicate how the fight was going.

This doing nothing was awful. Somehow he had not imagined it would be like this. In the morning he had let the team go off to Conway and had felt confidence, even relief, at its departure. Then what he had done had seemed the only thing to do. Now, face to face with the knowledge that twenty miles away the game was going on, that it was being fought out during the minutes that the silver clock ticked off so calmly while he, Bob Farrar, sat at home with his foot bandaged, doubts began to assail him. Had he been wise to put so much faith in Denslow?

He heard again the exclamations of Shorty, Jack and their fellows as they helped him limp up-stairs after breakfast. He heard the hurrying feet of boys that spread the news and the dismayed cries of those that listened. He heard Gid's anxious voice asking him how bad a wrench it was. Had he, after all, done well to say, "It's not so worse, but I'm afraid you'll have to get along without me this afternoon"? He had found a chance to

whisper something that no one but the captain heard. "Never mind me, I shouldn't be much good anyhow. Put on Denslow. You can trust him, Gid—I know."

And Gid had given him look for look and had said, "All right, Bob."

Was it all right?

The boys had been so good to him, not a member of the Crowd but had privately offered to stay and bear him company during the game, the great game that they had been counting on all the fall. He had been peremptory. He had said he would have no one, no one at all, and he had put it so that he had carried his point with them. But when the busses and barges had driven off with shoutings and tootings and waving of Standham banners, carrying the players and most of the school, too, and Bob was beginning to feel the emptiness and loneliness of everything, a little figure had appeared at the door and Tom Thompson had announced his intention of acting through the afternoon as Bob's walking bulletin board. It had been too late to send him after the others; the train had gone. Perforce Bob had had to let him

have his way. Had he but known it, therein the boy found greater pleasure than would have awaited him at Conway.

So Bob sat and listened. Minutes passed while his imagination was busy with the game. He pictured the line-up; Gid, stooping over the ball, cool, steady, unexcited; behind him, Denslow's dark face, grim, determined, as he had learned last night that Denslow could look on occasion. Buck, pale with a desperate eagerness; Pitkin, easy, but never for a second off his guard; Dudley, big, alert, agile, poised on his toes for a start—in fancy Bob saw them all. He watched the two lines come together and go down like the toppling of a pile of cards, line up again and go down again. He might have been there, he, Bob Farrar, at the bottom of the pack. Would it be better or worse for Standham if he were?

Why didn't Tom come? Something must have happened by this time. Oh, if he only hadn't promised that he'd stay here in the study like a lump on a log all the afternoon! What a ninny he was to do anything so rash! He might have known he couldn't stand it.

Was that a footstep? In Bob's suspense he twisted himself nearly out of his chair. Where could the boy be? Suddenly the silence grew ominous, laden with disaster. Fear fell on Bob's heart, the world turned gray. "We've lost," he thought, "and Thompson hates to come and tell me."

If only he had gone after all! Badly off as he was, the excitement of the game might have nerved him to outplay himself. There was always a chance. And he had deliberately cut himself off from it! If Standham lost Bob felt he could never forgive himself.

"But," argued his common sense, "you did what you thought was the best thing for Standham. It's no use fussing over what's done, you can't help or hinder now."

That was true, his intellect knew it, but still his thoughts pricked him with reproaches. The dreadful silence continued, it grew unbearable to Bob's inflamed imagination. Why didn't somebody come? He leaned forward and stretched after the crutches just beyond his reach. As he did so the quick pad-pad of feet struck on his ear. With

sudden revulsion of desire as the footsteps neared Bob shrank from the message they might carry.

The next minute Tom Thompson clattered into sight around the stairs. "We've rushed it—to their—ten yard—line! Five minutes—to play. The fellows up there at Centre—they're wild—can't even talk. I couldn't stay any longer—had to come and tell you. But I've got a boy fixed—all primed to cut down here the minute the half's done." Tom stopped to draw breath.

Light leaped into Bob's eyes. "Now we're playing!" he shouted. "I'd give my head to see it! Gid'll have that ball over the line or bust."

Tom regarded him wistfully. "I do wish you were there," he cried. "You'd do it, you'd make the touch-down!"

Bob opened his mouth to speak but something stopped the word. Tom jumped to the window. Hanging halfway across the sill he yodeled shrilly. "Up here!" he yelled. "Quick!"

The runner threw up his head and jerked out a single word, "Touch-down!"

Tom pulled himself back into the room and echoed the shout. "A touch-down! A touch-down!" he cried, hopping wildly about the study.

The newsbringer rounded the stairs hurling his words ahead of him. "A touch-down!—Dudley did it!—Sloane's kicked goal—Hooray!" He fell into a convenient chair. "Only eight to six now. My, ain't it great! Half's over, I guess; here come some more fellows."

The boys swarmed into Bob's room with shouts of jubilant satisfaction. "We'll lick Conway yet!"

"Beat 'em holler!"

"Just wait till next half!"

"My, but wasn't that a fight!"

"I'll bet it's the biggest battle ever on between the schools!"

"They say Conway expected a walk-over and started out to get it."

"Maybe they've changed their minds by now."

"That forty-yard run of Denslow's must have waked 'em up a bit!"

"Say, he struck a pretty good clip, didn't he? Jiminy, I'd like to have seen it!"

“And when Dud wriggled over the line—I bet Conway was yelling out of the other side of its mouth then.”

“Just wouldn’t you like to be over on the Standham bleachers about now?”

“Wouldn’t mind it a little bit. What’s the matter with Standham?”

“We’re all right!”

With commiserations for Bob, comment on the progress of the first half and calculations as to what might be hoped or feared from the second, the stay-at-homes passed intermission.

“That Denslow’s turning out something of a fellow after all,” said one at last.

“He may not be much on larks and sociability, but he seems to know a few things about football.”

“He’s a good player,” said Bob.

“Lucky we had him to put in.”

“He’ll get a livelier welcome home to Standham than his send-off last night, I reckon. Hope he won’t lay that up against us.”

“Say, fellows, it’s time we were sprinting back to Centre. They’ll be starting the second half in a minute.”

The boys trooped off and Bob sent Tom with them. From time to time as in the course of the first half, reports came back to him. The second had opened at a hot pace. Conway, angered by Standham's scoring in the first, had carried the ball into the enemy's territory and started to rush it to a touch-down. Persistently, fiercely she drove ahead and Standham fell back before her. Not a moment's check did the bulletin record. No Standham player could get his hands on the ball. Conway's superior strength proved irresistible and five points more were chalked down to her credit.

Scarcely had this gloomy news reached Bob when little Tom came tearing down from Centre with an antidote. "They missed the goal!" he cried. "Their crack goal-kicker too!"

The miss put new heart into Standham. It showed Conway to be fallible and therefore possible to beat. Under the impetus of this conviction Gid carried the ball across Conway's goal line and took care not to repeat the enemy's error.

The crowd at Centre Hall was now as crazy

with excitement as its complement on the field could possibly be.

"Whoever scores next gets the game!"

"Looks like it."

"If no scoring's done, why it goes to Conway anyhow."

"Oh, but there's a fair chance for another score."

The bulletin board proved the last speaker right, but it chalked the gain to the credit of the wrong side. Tom brought a doleful face to Bob's study. "They've done it," he said. "Conway's kicked a goal from the field."

Bob's eyes clouded. "That looks bad. Makes it seventeen to twelve. Still, one more touch-down would do the trick. They may get it. Game's not over yet."

The boys at the bulletin board abandoned hope. They shook their heads and glanced at the clock uneasily. The minutes ticked away steadily, and with their passing the bulletin announced fresh gains for Conway. She had the ball on Standham's forty-yard line; now she had rushed it for a ten-yard gain—what was the matter with Standham's defense?

For a minute the outlook brightened. Standham had secured the ball on a fumble.

"But what's the use? Denslow can't seem to do a thing," complained the latest visitor to Bob's study. "Farrar, if you were running that team, we'd score."

"Wait," Bob counseled, "wait and see. Denslow may surprise them yet."

"If he does he'll surprise us more. But what's he up to? Why doesn't he try a trick or two? If we can't pound through Conway, we might outgeneral 'em. Trouble with Denslow is, he hasn't the brains."

"Do the fellows 'phone that?" asked Bob.

"Not exactly. They do say he's using straight football, though. And that's no way to win against a heavier team."

"There's four minutes yet to play."

The discontented one departed. On his way to the depot of news he passed another. "They've forced us back to our fifteen-yard line," this boy reported to Bob. "Not much kicking in this game. Conway's got another touch-down in sight all right." He threw himself down on the couch. "Guess I won't go up again."

For a minute they sat silent; then Bob straightened, alert and eager. "Hello, something's doing. Hear that?"

The other jumped to his feet. At the door he collided with Tom Thompson. "Pitkin's making a run!" panted the little fellow.

"How far?"

"I didn't stop to see. Going yet, I guess. I couldn't wait to tell you. Denslow's worked a crisscross—Pitkin got the ball and—they were all tailing him down the field—I'll go back and find out more."

Together the boys started, but in a minute Tom's head was in the door again. "Met a fellow," he explained. "They tackled Pitkin—on their—ten-yard line. Be back soon."

Bob's heart thumped as it had never done in play or practice. He pulled out his watch and sat with it in his hand. Had Standham time to make a touch-down? He had not long to wait for news.

"Only five yards more," cried his informant, "but—oh, Bob, the half's most done!"

Bob nodded grimly. His eyes never left the watch in his hand. "A minute left to play," he muttered. His lips were dry and

he moistened them mechanically with his tongue. "One minute—half——"

"Yi—yi—yi!" From Centre Hall burst a cheer that floated across the campus and into the study, a yell, not short and sharp, but long continued, increasing. Bob snapped his watch shut and strained his ears to catch the beating of feet along the walk to Stone.

"Hurrah!" cried Tom, "Denslow's made—a touch-down—and Sloane's going—to kick!"

Standham was jubilant. Even the later news that the final goal was missed made little difference. A tie was practically a victory. Conway had boasted of the terrible things she would do to Standham this year, and she had backed her threats by a season of sweeping successes. The crowd that had surrounded the bulletin board at Centre Hall turned itself into an improvised comb and horn band and set off to the station to receive the home-coming victors with fitting noise.

Bob Farrar heard them go. "Tom," he ordered, "you make tracks for the station."

"But ——"

"I'll be all right. Skip!"

Tom skipped.

For a minute Bob regarded his swathed foot quizzically. As the outside door slammed he lifted it from the chair and hopped over to the window. He could see Tom hurrying down the road. "Pretty good time for a fellow that can't run," mused Bob. He made a tour of the room and came back to his chair.

Darkness fell, and at last through the darkness sounded distant cheering. It drew nearer, a tumult of many voices, punctuated every now and then by the short, sharp bark of an organized yell. Bob threw up the window and leaned far out, straining for the first glimpse of the returning school. He did not hear the thud of swift-coming footsteps until they reached his door. Then he turned to make for his chairs. Knock and opening of door were simultaneous. Denslow burst in, bringing a flood of light from the hall.

"What ——" he began. Suspicion chased surprise from his face.

"Hello!" cried Bob. Denslow's sudden entrance amazed him, but he was quick to speak. "Say, that was a ripping run you made! We had the game by telephone over here, you know. Congrats on the touch-

down!" His face was eager with enthusiasm.

Denslow still grasped the knob of the open door. What had he come for? Bob wondered. Aloud he asked, "How'd you get here?"

"Cut across lots," answered the other slowly. "Wanted to tell you—but no matter."

Bob looked at him curiously. The sullenness had gone from his face, but its expression Bob could not quite make out. Through the window volleyed the cheers to a weird, shrill, horn-and-comb accompaniment. The school, bearing its athletes on its shoulders, swept triumphantly across the lawn.

"We—want—Denslow!" came the cry. "We—WANT—DENSLOW!"

"Hear that?" asked Bob.

Denslow pointed to Bob's right leg. "What does that mean?" he demanded. His voice was accusing.

"What does what mean?"

Contempt stared for a second out of Denslow's eyes. Then he turned on his heel and swung the door to behind him.

CHAPTER X

THE CAPTAIN OF THE ELEVEN

As is the case with most schools, Standham rounds out her football season by the election of a captain and a manager for the coming year. Sometimes this event causes much heated talk and reveals not a little difference of opinion. The year when 19— were senior-middlers, saw it otherwise. There was a good deal of talk, indeed, but all the comments pointed to the school's agreement, at least on the subject of a captain.

"Sure thing who'll get it, of course," boys averred.

"Oh, sure!" other boys answered. "'Lec-tion comes Tuesday, doesn't it?"

It was a topic too easily disposed of; it offered no field for discussion, no opportunity for debating the merits of rival candidates. The academy, finding itself in those few unsettled days that follow the last game of football and precede the first train home for

Thanksgiving, soon swung back to the subject of the great game just over. Long before Tuesday afternoon it had been worn threadbare by busy tongues.

In his study at Stone Bob Farrar perceived the trend of public opinion and discredited it. The boys were looking for something that he believed would not happen. He could not have been a wide awake schoolboy and remained unaware of what his friends expected for him. He could not have been Bob Farrar and remained careless to the honor involved. But the academy was not the football squad, he reasoned ; whatever the school might have seen or might not have seen, his comrades on the field could not have been blind to the way he had played for the last two weeks.

He knew that he had once been a possibility for the captaincy. Long ago boys had put the idea into his head, and though he had pushed it resolutely aside, the thought had until lately lurked in the background of his brain, a pleasant hope. Now he felt that whatever chance might once have been his was gone. He had killed it himself by failing to keep up to the standard in his play. The team would

never choose for its captain a fellow without staying qualities. The boys knew better.

So Bob schooled himself to his disappointment. He had failed to qualify for the position ; to his mind that was plain to every football player. He even talked earnestly with Pitkin and Buck about whether Symonds or Hall would make the better captain.

"Sy is brilliant," he said, "but Hall's steadier and he'll manage the boys easier."

"Yes," Buck agreed, "Hall has more of a knack at getting along with fellows than Symonds has. Sy sets things at sixes and sevens sometimes."

"On the whole, Hall will make the better captain, don't you think so?" asked Bob.

"Yes," said Pitkin, "of the two he's the one for it."

Having decided how to vote, Bob tried to put the matter out of his thoughts. But hours suddenly emptied of excitement and practice, dragged slowly. He found that he had a surprising amount of free time on his hands, and in this his friends, though they were not football players, shared. Their minds had been full of the game for a week ; now all at once

they discovered that there was nothing absorbing to do.

"I say," cried Scrap after dinner on Tuesday, a twinkle in his eye, "what have you fellows on for to-night?"

"Nothing," said Shorty, "but the celebration. That will keep us busy, I guess. Hadn't slipped your memory, had it, Scrap?"

Scrap grinned delightedly. "Never a bit," said he. "Just asked to fill up the time. Tempus figits awful slow."

"What celebration?" Bob inquired. "This is the first I've heard of one. Going to leave me out?"

"Well, not exactly," drawled Shorty. "We're counting on you to fill the title rôle."

"Which is ——?"

"Captain of next year's eleven," promptly answered Hunt.

Bob looked grave. "You're joking!"

"Maybe you'll think so when you eat the spread we've ordered," said Ned Hensley. "Pretty substantial sort of a joke."

Bob groaned. "You've not, really! Don't you know—can't you see? The boys won't

give me the election. Why, I'm not in the running at all!"

The Crowd laughed. "Oh, no, you're not!" they jeered. "What fellow'd ever think of voting for you? You don't stand any show!"

"It's the truth," Bob maintained stoutly. "Wait and see. I'll bet you I won't be even named. And suppose I should get the vote—which I shan't—I, I couldn't take it."

On his way to recitation Shorty stopped at Gid Sloane's door. "Sloane," he said, "unless something's done to stop him Farrar is going to refuse that election to-night."

"What's that?" asked Gid.

Shorty was blunt. "He says if he's offered it he can't accept the captaincy of the eleven. We've been arguing with him for a solid hour. Can't budge him. Bob can be stubborn as a mule, as perhaps you know."

"Gives any reason, does he?"

"Says he isn't fit."

Gid thought a minute. "I'll see what I can do," he said. "Of course we don't want to feel too certain of an election before it comes off, but—it's always well to guard against emergencies. Glad you told me, Forbes."

During the last recitation period of the afternoon the captain went up to Bob's study. Bob was at home and alone.

Gid opened fire at once. "What's this I hear about your intending to refuse the captaincy if it's offered to you, Farrar? Is it true?"

"Who's been talking to you?" Bob demanded in his turn.

"Does that matter?"

"No, I guess it doesn't. But as to the other—yes."

"Do you mind telling me why?"

"You know, Gid, you can't help knowing. The fellows won't dream of doing such a thing anyhow. They—and you—know I'm not the one for the place at all."

"Sure? How did you get that notion, Bob?"

The red mounted in Bob's cheeks. "I can't play. You've seen it, the boys must have seen it too. Why, a fellow that wasn't fit to be on the team at the end of the season isn't the one for captain."

"If you mean that Conway game," began Gid, "your foot——"

"You know as well as I do," interrupted Bob, "that my foot was only an excuse. What if I did turn my ankle? My foot wasn't much hurt. Why, I'm off crutches now! It hurt at first of course, but keeping quiet that afternoon with the doctor's stuff on did it so much good that I actually forgot once in a while that I had a sprain at all!"

"Is that the whole story?" asked Gid.

"Isn't it enough? The team wants a fellow for captain that it can rely on. I don't seem to be that kind."

"Don't you know why you fell off in play the last two weeks?" demanded the senior.

Bob winced. "Because I'm not made of lasting stuff, I suppose."

"No such thing! Why, Farrar, you went stale. That's all there was to it."

"Was that it?" Slow comprehension dawned in Bob's eyes.

"What do you suppose was the first thing Davenport said when he came up here to coach?" Gid asked. "'What have you been doing to Farrar, Sloane?' That was what he asked me. He'd seen you play in October and he told me what was wrong. You were

overtrained. I didn't have the sense to guard against it or to understand it when it happened. I kept you working day in and day out till you reached the pink of condition and I never dreamed that after that must come a down grade. It was my fault, my carelessness, I'm responsible. Don't punish me by refusing the captaincy if you get the vote."

"You're too quick to shoulder all that goes wrong with your men, Gid. It was my own doing, all the extra gym and field work."

"I encouraged you in it when I ought to have warned you. Why, prevention of over-training is one of the A B C's of a captain's business, and I was blind to it, stone blind. Well, I've had my punishment all right. We might have beaten Conway if we'd had you at quarter, as fit as you were three weeks ago. Davenport said so after the game was over."

A new look had come into Bob's face, something of the old lightness and buoyancy that his friends had missed of late. "Tell me one thing, Gid," he said earnestly. "Did I do right, Saturday?"

"You took a risk," answered Gid slowly. "As things turned out you were justified."

Denslow went into that game like a tiger; it was his fresh strength that saved us from a bad defeat. But that doesn't alter the fact that you are 19—'s best player, Bob. It doesn't alter the fact that the fellows want you for captain, for they do want you, and that you're the one for the place. You'll come to it wiser than I. Your men won't be in danger of going stale because their captain doesn't see what's wrong in time to prevent it. You'll never over-train again, Farrar. Standham can trust you to keep yourself and your players in condition. And Standham needs you, Bob, needs you and wants you—I want you, the team wants you, the school wants you. We all look to you to gain us the victory next year."

Gid held out his hand. After a minute Bob laid his own in his captain's. "I'll try to, Gid," he said. "I'll take it if they really want me."

The two walked together over to the gymnasium. There in the Athletic Association's room Standham's various clubs and teams hold their meetings. Most of the football players were already present when Gid

Sloane and Bob entered. A few minutes later Denslow came in with two or three more. He crossed to the other side of the room and sat down. To Bob's fancy Denslow seemed purposely to have avoided him. His thought jumped back to the scene in his study on Saturday night. What had been the meaning of it?

Gid called the meeting to order and Bob stopped speculating. His heart was beating rather fast, he felt hot and excited, but he tried to fix his attention on the few items of business of minor importance that came first. They were quickly disposed of.

"It has been customary in these elections," said the captain, "to nominate by acclamation unless a written ballot is called for. What is your pleasure in the matter?"

Dudley jumped up. "Captain," he cried, "I move the nominations be by acclamation."

"I second the motion," called a voice.

The motion was carried.

"I await nominations for captain," said the presiding officer.

Pitkin rose. "I nominate Bob Farrar."

"Second it," called Symonds.

"All in favor," began Gid.

A rousing chorus of ayes responded.

"No." It was a single voice, alone, unsupported.

"Any further nominations?" inquired the captain.

No one spoke for a minute or two. Bob stared at the floor, he knew who had given breath to that vehement no. The other boys exchanged glances. Then Hall stood up. "I think I voice the sense of this meeting," he said, "when I move that the nominations be closed."

"Second the motion," cried three or four voices.

"Any remarks," asked Gid. "If not, all in favor—what is it, Denslow?"

With surprise, impatience, curiosity in their look, faces turned toward the senior-middler. "I know it is not my place to do it," Denslow was saying, "but if nobody else will I've got to protest against letting the only candidate for captain of Standham's eleven be a coward and a quitter, a fellow who will stay at home rather than risk his precious reputation in the hardest game of the season!"

Deliberately the words cut the amazed stillness of the room. Denslow sat down. The spell of surprise broke and a wave of indignant protest swept from mouth to mouth. Bob gripped the arms of his chair with both hands; like a flash he saw his action as Denslow had seen it. It had never occurred to him that anybody would think he had not gone to Conway because he had been afraid for himself.

Gid rapped for order. "Denslow," he said gravely, "you have brought a strange charge against Farrar here. It is only fair to him and to us that before we go any further you should give us your reasons for saying what you have said."

The scraping of Denslow's chair as he moved it back sounded startling in its distinctness, so quiet was the room. "Bob Farrar knows what I mean," he said. "Maybe the rest of you don't. I called him a coward and a quitter and I'll stand by those words. Why didn't he go to the game Saturday? You all know the reason he gave out—turned his ankle. I suppose fellows never play on sprained ankles. I suppose there's no such

thing as an ankle brace. I suppose a fellow who cares a lot about his team is perfectly happy to sit at home while it's fighting out the biggest game of the year. He's safe enough, no danger of his losing any of his reputation as a star. The school can always say, 'If only Farrar'd been there, we'd have beaten sure.' ”

The blood throbbed in Bob's temples. Denslow stopped a minute and looked around the room, letting his eyes travel slowly over the anxious, angry, incredulous, questioning faces turned to his. “It would have taken a pretty bad sprain to have kept most of you away from that game, wouldn't it? How about a fellow who can be off crutches in three days? What's more,” Denslow's words fell slower and more distinctly, “I saw Farrar Saturday night hopping around his room—without crutches!”

In a silence that was painful Denslow took his seat. Boys looked at each other furtively, unable to believe that they had heard aright. Others openly flouted the story. But Denslow's words had made an impression.

Pitkin relieved the strain. “Mr. Chair-

man," he said, "I should like to hear from Farrar."

Bob's face as he rose was pale but he held himself erect. His eyes looked straight into Pitkin's as he answered quietly. "It is true, the sprain—only a strain it was really—was not a bad one."

A murmur started, Pitkin's voice checked it. "Then why did you"—he hesitated—"stay at home?"

Bob flushed at the words. "Because I thought the team would be stronger with Denslow at quarter," he said. "By this I'm not making any play to the gallery. It's fact. I've been falling off lately—why, every one of you must have seen it! With that and the handicap of a weak ankle I knew I wasn't the man for quarter Saturday. I might have gone to Conway, then I'd have been on hand to go into the game if Denslow had got hurt. I didn't because"—Bob chose his words carefully—"because I was afraid if I went I'd be put on in spite of myself at the beginning of the game when I knew Denslow was the better player."

As an explanation this was a bit weak and

inadequate, and Bob felt it. But he could not round it out, he could not in Denslow's presence let the admission slip from his lips that the substitute's unpopularity had driven him to this as the only possible course of action.

"You don't suppose it was any fun to stay at home, do you?" he went on. "You don't suppose if I'd been able to play, ankle or no ankle, I'd ever have let the team go off without me? And you don't suppose I didn't fight to keep up to concert pitch during the weeks that went before? I did the best I knew how—for the school. It was Standham I was thinking about, and I don't see now how I could have acted any differently.

"Until this afternoon I hadn't a notion that you'd even think of me for the captaincy. I'm not going to tell you now that I don't want it, that wouldn't be true. But I am going to say just this, that I'd rather have your respect than your votes. Fellows, won't you believe that I'm telling you the truth?"

As Bob sat down, here and there applause started. It trailed uncertainly into silence. For the most part the boys did not know quite what to think.

"Pretty thin," muttered Denslow to his neighbor.

The captain surveyed his men. He saw their bewilderment, the struggle that went on in their minds was plainly written on the boys' faces. They wanted to believe Bob, but circumstances were against him. If what he said was true, why had he not trusted to the captain to lay him off? Surely Gid knew what was best for Standham.

"In all this that he has told you," said Gid quietly, "I want to say that Farrar acted with my knowledge and approval. I know that he did what he honestly thought was right. Some day Denslow will find this out, and be glad to own himself mistaken. He has not known Farrar as long as the rest of us have. There is a motion before the meeting. Are you ready for the question?"

"Question! Question!" called several voices.

"It is moved and seconded that the nominations be closed," continued Gid. "As this motion, if passed, will carry with it the election of the candidate already named, you may wish to put your votes in writing."

"Standing vote," suggested Buck.

"Aye, aye," cried the boys.

"All in favor of closing the nominations and thereby electing Bob Farrar captain of the eleven, stand up."

There was a great scraping of chairs as the players sprang to their feet.

"That will do," said Gid. "Those opposed."

Denslow stood up, alone.

"It is a vote," announced the chairman.

"Farrar is elected captain."

Symonds was on his feet at a bound. "Three times three for Captain Farrar!" he shouted.

The cheers were given with a will. The meeting even took a recess in strictly unparliamentary fashion to congratulate the new captain, to shake his hand, clap him on the back and tell him what his men thought of him. The boys' faces had cleared, relief shone brightly in their countenances. Gid's words had saved the day. If the captain had known about it, Bob's action was all right, of course. They might not entirely comprehend the meaning of it or quite appreciate it as yet, but they all felt that it had taken pluck, and that it had been done for Standham.

Then Gid succeeded in restoring order and the meeting went on.

After it was over, Bob intercepted Denslow in the entrance hall. "Can't we call it quits now and be friends?" he asked.

Denslow stared without speaking. Bob saw the look on his face and drew back his hand. "You still believe that I'm—what you called me?" he demanded.

"Why not?" countered Denslow. "You're a first-rate hand at pulling wool over fellows' eyes, but what I see, I see, Bob Farrar. That was a great sprain of yours! I don't believe you even turned your ankle. There was one thing I didn't tell 'em in there," nodding at the room still full of players. "Maybe you can explain it. You're good at explanations. You said you hurt your right ankle. When I saw you in your room on Saturday night you were hopping on that foot!"

It was Bob's turn to stand speechless. No ready explanation came to his tongue. From his silence Denslow drew his own conclusion. The school might still be hoodwinked by Bob Farrar, he himself saw clearly. He resolved that when opportunity offered other boys

should share his knowledge of Bob's true character. With this determination hot in his heart he swung open the outside door and disappeared into the campus darkness.

CHAPTER XI

THE CUT DIRECT

News of the football elections traveled fast over the school.

"Farrar got it by an almost unanimous vote," passed from mouth to mouth. "Only one against him."

Everybody knew what "it" was that Farrar had got and with the exception of the football squad Standham slept that night in complete ignorance of the fact that there had at any time been the least danger of his not getting it. Gid had secured this state of affairs.

"Aside from the plain facts of the elections," he had said, "don't spread what has happened in this room. Keep it dark if you can. It will do nobody any good to have the whole academy talking about it." After Denslow had slipped out, he added, "And it will do Denslow harm."

So for more than twelve hours no whisper of the occurrence reached the school.

Bob's walk to chapel that next morning was made a triumphal progress. In spite of the fact that the whole academy had yelled outside his windows the night before every boy he met turned out of his way to offer congratulations. Seniors hurrying along stopped to shake hands and express their satisfaction at the result of the election, senior-middlers clapped him on the back with slangy exclamations of pleasure, "junes" and even "ju-mids" stepped aside to let him pass and then fell in at the rear of his train, following with respectful admiration in their eyes. By the time they reached Centre Hall, the three or four boys who had left Stone together had grown into a procession. Had Bob been a conceited fellow that short walk from dormitory to chapel would have yielded him pride and pleasure. But though he liked popularity and desired to be thought well of by his fellows, too ostentatious a display of their feeling always made him want to run away and hide. Now while he mustered a gay outward control, inwardly he was calling himself the hardest of names for not having had sense enough to cut chapel that morning.

Constantly growing, the throng swept up the slope toward Centre Hall and there it found another crowd waiting for it. This poured down toward the first, and the two mingled with hearty cheers for the new captain.

"Oh, I say, aren't you overdoing it a bit?" demurred the cause of the ovation. "Let up, can't you?"

The only answer was a louder cheer as the chapel bell began to ring.

With a quick dart Bob twisted free and made for the Centre Hall steps. "I'm going in," he said.

On the steps watching the demonstration loitered a few seniors, hands in pockets, grinning, appreciative.

"Little too much of a good thing, Farrar?" they called. "You'll have to get used to it next year, you know."

Some one began to whistle "See the Conquering Hero Comes," and the others joined in teasingly, drawing back to give Bob passage. The action left Denslow standing alone at the top of the steps. Before he saw who it was Bob had sprung up. To the eyes of the

boys looking on Denslow seemed to linger a moment as though to make his action the more unmistakable. Face to face with the new captain, he turned abruptly and with no sign of recognition entered the hall. Bob halted for a second, flushed deeply, then he too passed through the door. In the presence of the whole school Denslow had given Bob the cut direct.

Instantly tumult broke out among the crowd. Indignation swept through its ranks.

"Did you see that?" boys asked each other.

"I'd like to know who could help it! what's he got against Bob?"

"Say, I didn't think he was that kind!" cried Spud. "He's seemed quite like a decent chap since Saturday, acted as though he sort of liked being around with fellows. I can't make him out."

Inside the chapel Bob had found his seat. Across the aisle, some dozen feet away, was Denslow's place, empty. Some one came in at one of the rear doors, and clattered down the bare wooden aisle. Shorty slipped into the

seat next Bob's. Neither spoke, but Bob understood and appreciated his coming.

The chapel bell began to ring again ; before it stopped all members of the school must be in their places. The boys outside reluctantly gave over discussion and trooped in, bottling up their feelings as best they might. Their minds were not in a state to pay much heed to the service and no sooner was it over and were they once more free of the chapel's restraining influence than they burst again into a flare of talk. In the minutes of silence new ideas had sprouted.

"I guess it's pretty plain now who cast that one vote against Farrar!" said a senior.

"Cad! Hasn't Bob always stood up for him?" demanded Ned Hensley.

"We mustn't forget he's the fellow that saved the game for us Saturday," Jack interposed.

"No, we've got to give him credit for that, all right," said Breck. "What I want to know is, why did he cut Farrar the way he did?"

"Jealous, most likely," Hunt suggested.

"You don't mean you think Denslow had an eye on the captaincy himself," gasped Spud.

"A new boy—on the sub team till the very last game!"

"I don't think," Hunt answered. "Green-eyed monster's the only explanation I can hit on, though."

"See here," asked a newcomer joining the group, "have you fellows heard that they had a flare up in the meeting yesterday? Did Farrar say anything about it to you, Truman?"

"No," said Jack. "What do you mean, Brassey?"

"They say," went on the fellow called Brassey, "that Denslow opposed Farrar's election because he stayed home Saturday—that he was afraid to play. They had it back and forth, hot and heavy for a while. Sloane stepped in and backed up Farrar. Denslow got rather mifty, I guess. I just asked Pitkin about it, but he wouldn't talk. Thought you might know something more."

The thin trickle of information thus started never reached bulkier proportions. Like Pitkin, the other football players refused to add to it. Rumor ran riot for awhile, but finally died for lack of sustenance.

Luckily for the football-won goodwill of the school the Thanksgiving recess stepped in to divert the academy's attention from Denslow's snub of Bob Farrar. It was on Wednesday morning that the episode occurred ; by late afternoon more than half the boys were scattered, some to their own homes, others living too far from Standham to make the journey, on the way to the homes of their friends. Denslow was one of the former ; Bob and Jack belonged to the latter class. Shorty Forbes carried them off with him to Boston.

It was inevitable that such a break in school routine should dissipate much of the ill feeling again stirred up against Denslow. Those who went away lost sight of it temporarily in other interests, and those who stayed were far from being left to their ordinary devices or to constant reminders of memory. Boxes from home, fat with turkeys, chickens and mincepies, diverted them ; the resident teachers invited them to long tramping expeditions, entertained them at their house, or otherwise attempted to give the Thanksgiving recess a true holiday character.

By the time the school reassembled the first

indignant excitement had cooled. Whatever it might be that had happened in the football meeting, after all it was a matter which lay between Denslow and Bob Farrar; the academy at large was not concerned. Denslow was in the wrong, certainly, but if Bob was content to let the affair drop, it was not the boys' business to take up the cudgels. Not that they reached this sane and sober judgment at once or entirely of their own uninfluenced volition; some continued long to account it treason to Bob to acknowledge any good point in Denslow. A conversation of which few of them ever heard did much to determine the general opinion.

Late Thanksgiving afternoon Shorty and Bob, Jack and a cousin of Shorty's took a walk for the purpose, as Shorty put it, of being able to get outside a little more turkey before bedtime. Jack and the cousin had dropped behind and in this Bob saw an opportunity for which he had waited and watched.

"Shorty," he began, "I want you to do something for me."

Shorty examined Bob suspiciously. "Now

what's coming?" he soliloquized. "You've got something up your sleeve, B. F., or you'd never go at it like that. I don't make promises with my eyes shut. I've got to know what I'm letting myself in for."

"I want you to be friends with Denslow, Shorty."

"Not the job for me, thank you. Just as much obliged, Bob."

Bob said nothing for a few minutes ; he was waiting for Shorty to speak again and he was not disappointed.

"Guess I'll be able to pick and choose my own friends a while longer, anyhow. Denslow's not my stripe."

"How do you know? You can't tell what stripe a fellow is until you get acquainted with him."

"No you don't, Bobby, my son, you don't pull the wool over my eyes a little bit that way. No sugar-coated pills for me. If you're undertaking to make me over into that kind, why say so right out ——"

"What kind?"

"You know well enough, B. F. Don't pretend you don't. You want me to shine up to

the fellow, thick as thieves, play nurse girl, cut his eye teeth for him and break his academy ice."

"No such thing!"

"And all because," went on Shorty unmoved, "he cut you dead as a door nail in the sight of the whole school, on top of something that you know more about than I do."

Bob flushed. "If you talk like that——"

"Oh, come off, Bobby. I'll say you want me to be a scion of Lucifer if you like that better. Anything to please. But just tell me this, what's Denslow got against you?"

"He misunderstood something that happened. Anybody might have done it; I don't blame him. And he's a fine fellow, Shorty, honest he is. He's not the standoffish kind we've all thought him. That came from another misunderstanding, something that happened when he first came. I can't explain, you'll just have to take my word for it. You know how all the boys have said he's seemed so different since the game. Well, I've been afraid—you won't think me cocky?—I've been afraid since that business Tuesday morning that some of them maybe would give

him the cold shoulder again in spite of his play, turn him in on himself, you know. And he needs the fellows—it must be awfully lonesome not to really know a single boy! Why, Shorty, I got to thinking about it the other night, how I'd feel if I didn't have you and Jack and Ned and all the rest of the crowd, let alone the other fellows in school. Suppose you all just went along and had nothing to do with me, as though I weren't around at all. I might as well be on a desert island and be done with it. And that, it strikes me, is where we've been keeping Denslow all the fall. Worst is, you see, I—I can't do anything about it now."

"It does sound tough, the way you put it, Bob. Poor Edward!" Shorty's tone held a musing melancholy; he could never be serious very long at a time. "Companion of my earlier youth, farewell! Sharer of my bed and board! Alas, thus to be thrust out for a stranger!" He shook his head sorrowfully.

"Oh, see here, Shorty, I don't want you to make Denslow your best friend! You needn't ask him to room with you senior year. I only want you to be decent to him. Treat

him as you would any other fellow in our class that you like well enough—not too much. The boys will take their cue from you.”

So when Denslow came back to school at the end of the Thanksgiving recess he found no such unfriendliness as he had looked for. Shorty Forbes happened to be near the car when the boy swung off, suit-case in hand. His “Hello, Denslow! Going my way?” sounded as pleasant as it was unexpected to Denslow’s ears. News that Shorty Forbes had been seen walking up with him to Dwight spread rapidly. That night three or four boys dropped into Denslow’s room. Once or twice the next day when he stood alone near a group some one managed to include him in the talk. The school noticed that members of the Crowd other than Shorty nodded to him when they met. Scrap Hayes asked him if he had ever played basket-ball, advised him to come down to the gymnasium and be “sized up,” and Ned Hensley invited him to join a tramp. Moreover it was observed that Bob Farrar spoke as usual whenever he passed Denslow on campus or in hall.

Subtly Denslow's position at Standham changed. His play in the game with Conway had won for him the school's gratitude and respect, and the boys did not suffer him to slip back into his old attitude of offense and defense. It continued to be felt by the academy at large that the coolness noticeable between him and Bob Farrar, shown more in their avoidance of each other than in any open slight, must be laid at Denslow's door, but in true offhand schoolboy fashion Standham slowly came to accept him as one of its own. "Though of course he's a queer stick," the boys explained to each other.

On acquaintance Denslow proved not at all the fellow they had been disposed to think him. Under the warmth of comradeship his glumness gradually melted, the old sullen look faded from his face, his manner lost its suspicious antagonism. "That Denslow," ceased to be his common title; to many of his classmates he became "Ned." The whole school joined in according him admiration and liking in place of hostility. But before this was perfectly accomplished many weeks passed, even months, and many things happened. What

did not happen was any accession of warmth in the relations between Ned Denslow and Bob Farrar. They continued to speak or nod when they met, and that was all.

CHAPTER XII

TOM GOES INTO TRAINING

IMMEDIATELY after Thanksgiving Bob set about keeping his promise to Tom Thompson. Enthusiastically he threw himself into the work of coaching his self-imposed pupil, but his desire for success did not this time master his self-control.

“I tell you right now, Tom, you’re not going to begin to run the first thing you do. You get over the ground now after a fashion. It’s a fashion that wouldn’t figure very well in a race, but we’ll fix that up by spring. Foundation first. It’s slow work and you mustn’t look for long strides yet awhile. This winter we’ve got to build you up into an all-round healthy fellow, just as though you were going in for baseball, or hurdling, or the running broad jump or tennis or golf or—well, anything and everything. There’ll be time enough when spring comes to pick out the kind of running you want to do and put

in some special work for it. That doesn't mean that you won't run a step all winter; the gym running track is always in commission. A few turns about it finish every gym class's work—you've found that out already.

"But mind you, we're going easy. I shall keep my eye on you and tell you just about what to do in the athletic line. Of course you have the regular class work three times a week with the gym instructor. I've been through it; I know just how little it really amounts to if a fellow wants to shirk it, and after all with the best intentions an hour and a half a week doesn't mean much in body-building. What you and I are going to do is to supplement the class training. You'll work a bit every day, not too much. Don't let me hear of you overdoing the thing. Not a minute more of practice than I tell you—glue that tight to your memory. Oh, you'll be tempted to put in an extra quarter of an hour here and another there. You'll reason that if so much does you some good a little more will do you more good. There's where you'll be wrong, dead wrong.

"I'm going to read you something dad

wrote me my first year here. I kept the letter and this last week I got it out and read it over." Bob pulled a crumpled envelope from his pocket. "Want to hear it?"

Tom's face assured him that he did. Bob found the place and plunged in. "The pater doesn't mince matters," he said. "Listen. 'You're a pretty fair athlete for your years, Bob—don't fizzle out. Guard against it. Be content to let well enough alone. Don't push yourself to the limit. When a thing gets to be an effort, drop it. Never finish a sprint without an ounce of energy left in you. When you feel yourself getting used up let sprinting alone for a while. Don't go into an event unless you can come out of it with some freshness left, not utterly done up. I've no fancy for getting home from prep school the shell of an athlete, big-muscled, brawny, but sapped of all his nervous force. It's nervous force that counts for victory. Don't drain the reservoir dry by trying to do better than your best, Bob. If you want to amount to anything in college and after that in the bigger world beyond college, hold yourself back, keep something in

reserve. Remember you're not a man yet, you can't do a man's work. Every year ought to see you sounder and stronger than the year before. When you find yourself slipping back instead of going forward, take it as a sign that something's wrong. Go easy then, let up a bit. Ten to one you've been overworking. Don't forget that in athletics ambition must wait on common sense. A good many don'ts, Bob, but you will find them all worth taking into account.'"

Bob folded up his letter.

"But I forgot fast enough," he said. "I forgot all this fall. Queer how advice like that loses hold of you unless you've some experience to back it up. I guess I can remember it now all right though. So I pass dad's Don'ts on to you, Thompson. Just keep 'em in mind when things seem to drag this winter and you can't see that you're getting on as fast as you want to."

Tom carefully laid away the advice in a pigeon hole of his brain. Everything that proceeded from Bob's lips he accepted as words of wisdom, all Bob's orders he was ready to adopt as the rules of his life. Bob

need have had no more fear of Tom's exceeding his directions than of his failing to carry them out in every particular.

"This winter it is light gymnastics, remember. We want to aim at general development, make you sound as a nut all over. You get a taste of the apparatus work in class. Now take a pair of light Indians from that rack and let me see what you can do with clubs."

Tom trotted over to the rack and picked out his clubs. Bob swung himself to a seat on the "horse." Through the high western windows above the running track slanted the yellow sunlight. The gymnasium was empty save for the two boys.

Tom swung his clubs with painstaking care and then at Bob's order went through with the calisthenics learned in class. Now and then Bob interposed directions or slipped off the "horse" and gave an object lesson in some movement. At the end of twenty minutes he had satisfied himself as to Tom's present attainments.

"That's all right," he approved at last. "You've got the hang of most of those exercises

pretty well. Now the days when you don't have gym come in here and spend half an hour going through just what you've been doing for me. At the end take three turns around the running track. Come on, we'll go up there and I'll show you. First, like this," Bob set off at a slow jog-trot, Tom at his heels. "Now, hit her up a little, not much. Third time, faster, but not enough to get winded. Arms easy. See, bent a little at the elbows, let 'em swing with the body. There, that's good."

Bob stepped aside and watched Tom round the last curve alone. Then he led the way down-stairs.

Again on the floor, he stripped off his coat. "I'm going to show you two or three exercises I used to take morning and night just after and before bed. They're good for a fellow's back and stomach ; strengthen the muscles."

Tom gave close attention.

"Try 'em," directed Bob. "They're simple, but first-rate for results."

Pupil and teacher went through the movements together several times.

"You want to breathe deep while you do

'em. There, I guess you've caught on. Six times when you first pop out of bed in the morning, six again just before you go to bed at night. That's enough for a while. Be out of doors a lot—— Skate, do you?"

"I never got the chance."

"Well, you must learn when the lake freezes. That'll likely be soon. Keep your windows open at night and drink water by the quart. Not much at meals, you know, but a glass night and morning and all you want between times. None while you're in gym though. And 'lastly,' as the minister said Sunday, don't think all the time about this exercising. When you've done it, drop it out of your mind. Go in for fun with the fellows, a jolly time outdoors—I don't need to tell you to keep along with your studies." Bob grinned. "I'll look in on you now and then and set you some more stunts before long. When anything bothers, come to me and if these tire you, don't fail to tell me. So long."

On the steps the boys parted. Tom took the path that led to Dwight. Gid Sloane, happening by on his way to the post-office,

linked his arm in Bob's. "Come up for the mail, Farrar. What's doing?" he added, with a curious glance at the small figure hurrying toward Dwight.

"Didn't you know I've applied for the post of assistant gym instructor?"

"First pupil?" queried Gid. "Tutoring the conditioned, Bob?"

"Not exactly. Everybody needn't apply."

"What do you think you can make out of that little chap? Sprinter or pole vaulter?"

Bob fell in with Gid's bantering tone. "I'm in favor of the three hundred yard dash," he said.

"He'll break all the records next May, of course."

"Sure. What else should he be going in for?"

Word of what Bob was doing soon got out among the boys. It was impossible for the two principals in the affair always to hit on half-hours when the gymnasium was unoccupied by classes. As they shinned up ropes, took turns jumping, or swung in the rings, the members of these classes shot frequent glances toward the quiet corner where Tom

was going through his exercises under Bob's eye. At first the boys were inclined to look upon the whole matter as a huge joke. Many were the facetious inquiries made in and out of the gymnasium as to the pupil's progress.

"Say, how long does it take him to run a mile, Bob?" inquired Symonds.

"What a question, idiot!" Reproof came instantly from a bystander. "He's a four minute miler, of course."

"About five seconds for the forty yard dash, I suppose?" hazarded Brassey.

"Here's a problem for you, fellows," said Breck. "If Tom Thompson can run a mile in four minutes, forty-five and four-fifths seconds on one day, and cover forty-five-yard low hurdles in five and a-half seconds the next, what's his record the third day at the running high jump?"

"Five feet, eleven inches," somebody promptly hazarded.

"Wrong," said Breck. "Five feet, ten and an eighth."

"Prove it!"

A good-natured wrangle followed.

Such was the drift of talk one night when

the boys had gathered around Bob, while from the floor he watched Tom finish his work on the running track.

"Ain't he a sprinter?" murmured a voice in feigned admiration.

"My, see him hit her up!" said another.

"Say," a third suggested, "he'll clear out the whole shooting-match in May, won't he?"

Bob turned on the speakers. "See here, you can poke all the jokes you want to at me, but let that little chap alone. Don't let him hear you shooting off your funny guns. This is a deadly serious business to him."

"But, Farrar, what under the sun do you bother with him for?" asked Brassey. "You'll never make an athlete out of him!"

"He'll do better than he does now before the winter's over. Wait and see!"

"One of Farrar's freaks," commented the school at large.

Bob, having once put his hand to an undertaking, stood by it staunchly. By their teasing, the boys had taken the best possible way to make him more determined than ever to effect results with his pupil.

"But he's so awkward!" expostulated the Crowd.

"No style about his running," said Hunt. "Oh, you're not the only fellow that watches when he does the jog-trot act."

"You're just wastin' your time, Bob," Scrap declared. "Why, his legs are regular sticks! Arms, too. No muscle about him."

"What would you expect?" Bob demanded. "If you'd spent most of your lives on your backs, Hunt and Scrap and the rest of you, maybe you wouldn't have much muscle to boast of." He sketched the facts of Tom's short history.

Scrap sat bolt upright during the recital. When Bob was through he drew a long breath. "I take it all back, every word of it. Say, he's spunky, ain't he!"

"My sentiments, too," put in Hunt. "He deserves to win a race if ever a fellow did."

"If we can help any time just call on us," cried the Crowd.

From their lips Tom's story filtered through the school. Thereafter more than one boy followed Tom Thompson's efforts to advance along the road toward athletic prowess with a

hearty interest second only to Bob's own. From time to time the Crowd took it upon themselves to encourage Tom's tutor.

"He's comin' on, Bob," Scrap would say. "I watched him handle the clubs yesterday. He's got the hang of a trick I thought he'd never catch on to."

"Beginning to put some form into his stride," commented Jack.

"I say, his muscle's commenced to sprout," Ned added. "Oh, 'twon't lift a house yet, nothing but a chicken-coop, maybe, but there's something doing."

When Bob repeated bits of these remarks to Tom, the boy brightened. Faithfully he was doing his duty by the exercise Bob had prescribed for him, but true to his instructions, no more than his duty.

Now he doubled up his arm and viewed it doubtfully. "It's a bit bigger maybe than it was before Thanksgiving, but I can't see much muscle about it."

"What do you want," asked Bob, "to have lumps on your arms and legs?"

Tom glanced at Bob's strong arm. "Double it up, won't you, please?"

Bob did so.

Tom surveyed it admiringly. "That's about how I'd like mine to look," he said.

Bob laughed. Then he turned sober. "See here, youngster, you're not my build. Your arm can't stand as much muscular development as mine, neither can any part of your body. It wouldn't be normal. Get what muscle you're entitled to by rights, but spread it out all over you, don't lump it in any one or two places. Look here!" They were at work and like Tom, Bob was in gymnasium clothes. Under his firm white skin the smaller boy could see the supple play of his muscles as he bent and twisted and swung his arms. He straightened up. "It's pretty well distributed, you see. That's what the pater did for me. Knock out of your head the idea that the size of a muscle is what's worth while about it. It isn't the size, it's the discipline you've brought it under.

"Lots of fellows think that if they've got muscle, knots and cords of it, bunching out in spots or all over 'em, they're made. But muscle itself doesn't count for so much as the training of it. Set out to make your muscles

do team work ; get 'em in the habit of playing together. Why, it's just the same as in football or baseball or hockey ! Individual play doesn't make for half so much gain as good team work. A bunch of stars that aren't trained to play together will almost always go down before a team that's not so brilliant but knows how to act as one man. A big muscle's like a star player, first-rate maybe at its particular job, but not to be rated alongside a set of smaller ones trained to work together.

"So, mind you, no straining after big kinks of muscle, Tom. Take what come to you and get 'em in the habit of answering on the dot every order from your eye or your ear or any other of your senses. Brain, not just brawn, is the winning stuff."

Tom meditated upon this.

"And I read somewhere," he said at last, "in one of those books I used to get hold of, you know, that an athlete never forgets that he's a gentleman."

Bob's face kindled. "Why, that's what the pater told me ! Do I quote him too much ? You see he's been my manual of

rules and guide to athletics in general, has the pater. 'Remember first, foremost, and all the time, Bob,' he said, 'that you can't be a first-rate athlete unless you're a gentleman.' The next class is due pretty soon, we'd better skip, Tom."

They went below to the lockers in the basement. A few minutes later, after shower baths and brisk rub-downs the two were dressed again for the campus. At the door of the gymnasium they passed Denslow coming in. The disdain Bob had met in his eyes ever since that night after Standham's game with Conway was replaced by a puzzled curiosity.

"Now what has he got in his head?" Bob wondered. "He looks as though he'd just discovered in me a strange beast that he couldn't quite fit into any of the zoölogy divisions."

CHAPTER XIII

THE SHORTY VIGILANCE COMMITTEE

WINTER brings to Standham ice and snow in abundance. All through the frozen months skating and hockey flourish on pond and river ; the white hills echo the shouts of coasters, snow-shoers and experimenters with skees. Indoors, basket-ball claims a share of athletic attention, while the upper-class teams make ready for their tussle for the school championship, determined by a series of games at the end of the term.

But in the early weeks of winter, more than at any other time in the whole school year except in June, sport is compelled to give over something of its hold on the boys' spare time and attention. Then it is that thoughts of the midwinter examinations begin to trouble the minds of even the studious. Before those who have been inclined in these matters to let the morrow look out for itself, they loom black and loathsome, an inevitable nightmare ; for all, except for the bookworms

that would, if allowed, batten on learning and learning only, they hold their terrors.

Not that the average Standham boy cares only for sport; he is interested in everything that is presented vividly to his attention. Scrap, the wide-awake captain of 19—'s basketball team, would confess, when hard pressed, to a real liking for mathematics, and even Shorty on occasion grew excited over passages in Cicero's orations. It was not so much the studies that most of the boys objected to, as the examinations that came afterward.

"They break up the time so," Shorty would aver with a rueful shake of the head.

To this mixed prospect of the pleasant and the unpleasant Bob and his friends returned after the Christmas holidays. Scrap plunged at once into basket-ball and proceeded to rule with an iron rod of discipline the "galley slaves," as Shorty called his players. Jack and Ned Hensley clamped on their skates and set out to make the hockey team. Spud announced he was going in for skeeing and borrowed Shorty's skees for purposes of trial, a combination which wrought his immediate sprawling downfall, to the hilarious delight of

his friends. Hunt and Bob Farrar buckled on their snow-shoes and took long tramps over the deeply drifted fields, and the whole Crowd, whatever might be each member's winter specialty, spent many hours flying with steel shod feet over the shining face of pond and river.

There was talk of a relay race on ice to be skated against Conway, and every Standham performer of any speed and endurance was urged to make application for the team. By four o'clock of an afternoon the ice would begin to fill up with darting gray, blue, red and white figures; the whole school seemed to adjourn to the lake, instructors not excepted. The tutors circled about for a few minutes and then shot away with long strokes down the pond, often in the company of two or three boys. Now and then a gray-haired professor swung along, renewing the skill of his youth. Here and there on the smooth gray surface near shore a knot of boys drew about some skater executing fancy figures. Bob Farrar had been accounted the most adroit of these performers until Denslow let his skill be seen. He had spent three winters in

Canada and there were few things he could not do on skates. The two would sometimes be persuaded to match figures for the benefit of an applauding circle. And always Denslow would put the final touch of intricacy to the exhibition, quite as much to Bob's admiration as to that of the other spectators.

"He's beaten me out," Bob would say frankly. "I can't better that last trick of his, but he's probably got half a dozen others just as good up his sleeve." Bob knew how to give credit where credit was due, and he was not too proud to do it. Then he would shoot away through the circle out on to the wide glittering field of ice.

"He's the best fancy skater I ever saw outside of Canada," was Denslow's comment. "They're the finest ever up there. I'm only ordinarily fair. You ought to see one of the fellows I know in Montreal do stunts!"

To himself he thought, "Now I wonder why Farrar said that? I can't make him out. What's his game? For he must have one. He's a smooth-spoken, smooth-acting chap. Pity it's only skin deep."

Bob, skating away by himself, was saying,

"If he wants to think me a coward, why he'll just have to think it, that's all. I certainly can't explain. I can't go to him and say, 'See here, Denslow, don't you know the boys wouldn't have stood you in that Conway game at all if they'd had a notion I could have managed to stump through it?' I guess I see myself making a little remark like that! Pretty speech, wouldn't it be?"

So the two boys, though often thrown together in sport, remained, outdoors as well as in, separated by the gulf of misunderstanding and practically strangers to each other.

Tom Thompson spent all the time he could muster on the pond. Before sitting down to put on his skates he liked to stand for a few minutes and watch the scene. The soft ringing of the skate-strokes pleased his ear, and the swift free motion of the skaters satisfied his eye. But he did not stand long looking on. Tom had made friends in his own class and they had taught him to do more than sit on the bank or take a few wary steps near shore. His performance was not yet all that he or his friends desired; his feet still had a tendency to shoot out from under him, grace and

agility were yet to come, but he took his tumbles with a laugh and he was gradually getting the mastery over his skates.

Meanwhile his cheeks grew rosy and his flesh hard and in moments of excitement the old look slipped entirely away from his face.

"Bless me, youngster!" his father had greeted him at Christmas time. "Who's this? My boy? Just give me your recipe for shedding a few years, won't you?"

Perhaps of all the boys who came back to Standham after vacation Tom carried the most eager hopes. The winter term looked to him a pleasant stretch of weeks wherein he might work toward the realization of his ambition.

"Dad says he'll come up for the meet," he confided to Bob, "in May. I told him about all the other things there would be besides racing, the pole-vault and hurdling and shot putting, just everything I could think of, and how Standham holds the prep school record for the broad jump, so it would seem worth his while, you know. But he said he was coming just to see me run."

No fears of approaching tests disturbed

Tom's dreams, except as he caught them from his classmates, and he was immune to the most acute form of the examination-ague. In this immunity Shorty shared, but not for the same reasons. It seemed constitutionally impossible for Shorty to take examinations seriously. Year after year he had neglected his work to put faith in a luck that continued all but to desert him in his hour of need. Only because of the possibilities his instructors saw in him had he been allowed to stay through the first two years of Standham's course, yet he confidently expected to spend as easily the two remaining. He looked for no sudden ejection ; Shorty was impervious to warnings, not easily scared. Far from lacking ability he possessed more than his fair share of brains. To learn was so easy for him that it seemed hardly worth his while to tackle books seriously. So he had fallen into a habit of neglecting his lessons. "Never do to-day what you can put off till to-morrow," he was fond of quoting.

Truth to tell he had worked more steadily in his senior-middle year than he ever remembered to have done before in his life.

Shorty's method had never included absolute neglect. For days he would refuse to open a book and then with a short-lived spurt of industry would equip himself for a single brilliant recitation. In this way he had managed to keep his head above the engulfing wrath of his teachers. "A fellow can learn enough in class to keep him going," he would say, "if he just opens his eyes and ears. And as long as I've got to be on hand at recitations I might as well put 'em to some use—saves time."

"What's the good of studying, anyhow, when a chap's got plenty of other things to do?"

Shorty threw this question at the Crowd one night, much as he would have shied a pebble into a brook. It recalled unpleasantly the February examinations which, though several weeks off, had already begun to agitate the surface of the boys' thought.

Suddenly in the midst of their talk Bob sat up. "Shorty," he exclaimed, "what became of those conditions you got last June?"

Shorty felt in his pockets hurriedly, his face wore for a minute a worried look.

"Don't scare a fellow like that, Bobby! Almost made me think I'd lost something. But it's all right. I've got 'em safe."

"You were to work 'em off in September," Bob persisted.

"So I was. And I did take a shy at 'em, but studying in summer," Shorty shook his head mournfully, "doesn't suit my constitution. Physical impossibility to open a book in August. Fact. Some folks aren't built to see it that way; the Prin's one. He can't help it though, so I don't blame him. He and I understand each other all right, had it out in September. Didn't I mention our little interview to you fellows? The Prin doesn't want to part with the chief ornament of his academy."

Jack interrupted. "If you flunked again last fall, when are you going to work those conditions off?"

"Special exams week after next. So's not to have 'em get mixed up with the regulars, you know."

"Studied any yet?" asked Hunt.

"No. Got a tutor, of course. Thought I'd had about enough to do lately."

"What do you expect to do about 'em, anyway?" Scrap demanded.

Shorty looked vague. "Oh, I'll see when it gets a little nearer time for the show to open. What do you take me for? A greasy grind?"

"Anybody spoken to you yet about the resemblance?" inquired Ned Hensley.

"Shorty," said Bob, "we've been neglecting you lately. It's a shame. But we'll make up for it now, won't we, fellows?"

"You bet!" shouted the boys.

Bob pounded on the table. "The society for the continuance of Shorty at this academy will please come to order. There's an item of business that needs immediate attention, namely: Shall Shorty work off his conditions week after next? All in favor signify it in the usual way."

"Aye! Aye!"

"Those opposed."

Not a voice answered.

Shorty groaned.

"It is a vote," announced the presiding officer. "I appoint as a committee on ways and means, Ned Hensley, Jack Truman and Scrap Hayes. What they decide on, goes."

Thereafter ensued for Shorty two weeks of more continuous effort than he had been accustomed to, even of late. The committee on ways and means mapped out for him a schedule wherein work and recreation had their allotted time, and as far as in them lay the boys saw to the carrying out of its demands. Shorty demurred with no effect. He found he must amuse himself alone if he refused to keep this routine of hours, and solitary pleasures did not taste well to Shorty's palate.

"You'd never have got these conditions in the first place," Bob told him, "if the Shorty Vigilance Committee had been at work last year. It won't do you any good to growl. We've set out to pull you through these exams; you know you'll be fired if you flunk 'em again, so you'd better pitch in and help."

"No thanks to you for the job."

Bob grinned. "Oh, we can wait a bit for the grateful act." He consulted a note-book. "Aren't you due in your study about now? Algebra's calling. Run along, little boy."

Shorty departed with a vengeful slam of

the door. He felt it his duty to register opposition, but he was not without appreciation of the good points of the system against which he kicked. His tutor had within the last few days dropped vituperation for compliment.

“Frankly, Mr. Forbes,” he had said to Shorty at their last interview, “I do not know to what circumstances to attribute this marked gain in the grasp of your subjects. But if you continue during the coming week to do as well as you have done in this, I think I can safely assure you that you will have no trouble with the examinations.”

Getting Shorty through his conditions absorbed the attention of every senior-middler in Stone. Other dormitories volunteered to help, if outside aid were needed at any time, but they were seldom called on. It struck the boys as a new sort of game; Shorty had the gift of making everything in which he was concerned interesting and even exciting.

Bob came into Stone with Pitkin one night to find the stairs just outside Shorty’s study occupied by a cheerful group. Jack pointed at the “busy” sign tacked on the door.

BUSY BONING!

*Beware!***S**horty's at
secret
studies**S**ays :
kedaddle!
cuttle !!
cat !!!

Ned Hensley showed two coils of rope festooned around the banisters behind him. "We've locked the door and taken out the fire-escape ropes, and there's a fellow under every window. When he gets his exams done we'll let him out. He was obstinate to-night and wouldn't do a thing in hours."

"I've heard of this stunt of the Crowd's," said Pitkin. "You do it pretty thoroughly. Did Forbes try the fire-escape once?"

"Didn't he!" cried Scrap. "Slid down as neat as a pin and took a whole evening off. We thought 'twas pretty quiet, but we didn't catch on. Along toward nine, in saunters Shorty, cool as a cucumber but tickled to death. 'Sort o' monotonous,' says he, 'this study business. All work and no play makes Shorty a dull boy.'"

"But how do you know he's working now?" asked Pitkin.

Bob explained. "It's like this. The only thing the matter with Shorty is that he's never ready of his own will to study. When he can't get any fellow to jolly or trot round with, when there's nothing else to do, he'll work fast enough. But he's got to have the conditions just right. That's what we're doing, solving the problem of the conditions. We do it by the process of elimination."

"Hear him talk algebra in an off-year!" murmured Spud. "'Limination! What was that? Do you remember, Jack?"

Bob ignored Spud.

"Besides, Shorty knows it's up to him, and he's really as keen on getting through as we are to have him. It's pass or bust with him now."

A plaintive voice came from within the study. "Oh, say, I'm done," it said. "I'm lonesome. Let me out, won't you?"

"All O. K.?" questioned Scrap cautiously.

"All but one."

"Finish that first."

"But, it's nine o'clock," objected the voice. "I'll do it the first thing in the morning."

"Do it now," ordered the inexorable Scrap.



HE DASHED FOR THE STAIRS

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He had been chosen chairman of the committee on ways and means, Ned Hensley having objected to the position on the ground of being Shorty's roommate.

"Can't I come out till I do? Grub'll be getting scarce."

"No. We'll wait for you."

Silence fell again in the study.

"There's a spread on," Jack explained to Pitkin, "so he's hurrying."

Pitkin went up-stairs to Gid Sloane's room, and the group on the stairs waited. A few minutes later Shorty spoke again. "All done, honor bright."

Ned unlocked the door. Shorty, his hair tousled, broke through and flinging wide his long arms dashed for the stairs. "Come on, come on! Don't let's waste any more good time," he called over his shoulder.

When the day of trial came his friends were more worried than Shorty himself. That young man, chained for two hours to a desk in a classroom whose windows gave glimpses every now and then of boys hurrying along, skates over shoulders, toward the pond, made the best of a badly cut up holiday. His pen-

cil raced over the paper, translations and equations falling from its stroke ; now and then he nibbled the rubber and surveyed his work, but not often.

On the pond and in the fields the Crowd collected in twos and threes.

"Do you think he really stands much show?" asked Hunt.

"Scrap says he does in algebra," said Ned. "He had him cornered for an hour and a half last night and just pelted him with problems."

"The Cæsar'll be worse," Spud put in. "I hope he doesn't get that bridge place."

"Did you ever hear of an exam with that in it?" Jack inquired. "Folks like first-rate to scare a fellow about it, but I notice they leave it out of the passages to be translated."

"I hope he'll pull through all right," breathed Bob.

"He didn't act scared." Spud was optimistic.

"You can't tell much by that," said Ned. "Shorty'd be cool and easy if Mr. Wetherell was firing him."

"Let's see how he feels when he gets out," Hunt suggested.

But though the boys were on hand when Shorty left the recitation hall they got little satisfaction from his answers to their excited questions.

"Hard? No, I reckon not. 'Bout so-so. An exam's only hard if you don't know how to answer it. Well, did I? Yes, after a fashion. Got along, I guess. My skates down at the pond, Ned? Good. Thought maybe you'd forget." Shorty led the way to the ice.

"Now what can you make out of that?" the boys asked each other.

"I'll bet he's flunked again!" Spud's hopes sank.

"And I'll bet he hasn't!" Bob spoke cheerfully. "Anyhow the ice is too fine to lose."

Late the next afternoon Shorty received word to call at the principal's house. He went at a quarter to nine. On his return he found the crowd assembled in his study.

"Well?"

Shorty from the door surveyed the roomful with deliberation. "Blue-looking lot," he commented. "Cheer up, can't you? Let's get out of this and celebrate."

"Celebrate what?" cried the boys.

"Not my funeral, anyhow."

"What'd he say?" demanded Ned. "Can't you tell a fellow?"

"Then you really did squeak through, Shorty?" asked Scrap.

"Squeak through!" Shorty's tone held an injured note. "Don't I generally do a thing up brown when I do it at all, Scrap Hayes? Told me he was thinking of making me joint head of the Latin and Math departments."

"Quit it, can't you?" cried Jack.

"Said he couldn't bear to deprive you all of my company," Shorty went on. "I told him if I left you'd be so lonesome, you'd go too. He said he'd been thinking that would be the way of it and he couldn't have his academy go to pieces like that. Asked me if I'd stay for a consideration and I said yes."

"What was the consideration?" inquired Bob.

"That he'd call it even between the curriculum and me, and cross off old scores."

Scrap confronted Shorty. "Answer me one straight question, Shorty Forbes! Did you pass those examinations?"

Shorty eyed Scrap calmly. "Wouldn't I be

packing my trunk if I hadn't? As it is," he tapped his forehead significantly, "just now I carry a little too much cargo up here. Got to unload. Come along and help, won't you? I'm for having out the double ripper; the moon's bright."

CHAPTER XIV

FOR THE HONOR OF THE ACADEMY

IN the weeks that had passed since the football elections the impression of a definite disagreement between Bob Farrar and Ned Denslow had gradually grown dim in the mind of the school. To be sure they were not particularly intimate, they did not choose each other's company, they were never seen alone together, but in public they seemed on fairly good terms. As neither paraded any disagreement, their relations were such as to escape general remark. The academy at large took this to mean that the affair last fall, whatever it might have been, had blown over. A few boys, more keen witted or better informed, understood that things were still as they had been between the two; by tacit agreement they had elected to live and let live, that was all.

During the period of midwinter examinations an episode occurred which forced on the notice of all the members of Standham's

senior-middle class the real state of affairs. It grew out of an observation which Ned Hensley made the first day of this uneasy season and reported to Bob.

That night Bob pulled his geometry out of the bookcase with a sober face. Cicero was behind him, angles and quadrangles claimed next attention, but his thoughts were not entirely of them. "Sport the oak, will you, Jack," he said as he settled himself at the table to study. Bob now and then liked the flavor of English slang on his tongue.

Jack, also with a geometry in hand, stopped long enough in his tour of the room to pick out a sign from the collection on the door and hang it outside. "Positively no Admittance," it read.

"Who'd you think has got time enough to make calls this weather, Bob?"

But Bob was setting down angles at a furious rate on the blotter and took no heed.

Jack began again on his steady tramp. From door to window, from window to couch and back again he paced in deep absorption. "In the circle whose centre is O, let the arc AMB be greater than the arc AMF. To

prove the chord AB greater than the chord AF. Draw the radii OA, OF and OB ——”

Jack's pedestrian way of learning geometry usually served as the butt of many jokes.

“What's your pace?” Hunt would ask. “How many miles an hour, Jack?”

“Ought to wear a pedometer, you'd break the record.” This from Scrap. “Champion tramp o' the country.”

“Can't you use that power for something, Bob? Pity to let it go to waste like this,” would be Ned's suggestion.

“Lend you my lathe, Bobby.” Shorty's brain was fertile in expedients. “We'll rig up an attachment and when Jackstraws gets to going full blast we'll clap on the connection and turn out bric-a-brac while he studies. Lots of jolly little wooden things he'll be good for.”

But jokes are far from boys' minds in examination season.

“To prove AB greater than AF,” pondered Jack, enlivening his brain by the movement of his feet.

Bob at the table struggled in vain after concentration. An idea put into his mind

by Ned Hensley disputed with geometric demonstration for the possession of his attention. He threw down his pencil and made an excursion about the room. Jack, intent on his proposition, mechanically steered out of his way. Bob dropped into his chair again and for five minutes figured with desperate energy. Then he swung around on his roommate.

"Jack! I say, Jack!"

"The radius perpendicular to a chord bisects the chord and the arc subtended by it," mumbled Jack. "Let AB be the chord——"

Bob picked up a Latin grammar and with its help nimbly knocked the geometry from Jack's hand.

"Here, quit that! What you doing?"

"Wake up, Jack! I want to talk to you."

"Talk! Huh," Jack regarded his roommate as though he thought he were taking leave of his senses, "this is a pretty time to talk! What about?"

Bob was silent for a minute; then he counter-questioned abruptly, "What do you know about Allen Breck, Jack?"

"Know about him? Same's you, I guess.

He seems a good sort, jolly, always on hand for any fun that's going. Stands pretty high in his classes, that's the only thing I've got against him. How a fellow can get the marks he does and have all the time he throws around loose, beats me!"

Jack was not famous for brilliant recitations. Whatever knowledge his curly head might hold found its way there only after hard labor.

"Yes," said Bob, "his marks are always good. That's why I can't quite believe it."

"Why, what's the matter?"

"I hate to repeat it, but Hensley spoke to me just after supper. Did you ever," Bob hesitated, "did you ever notice anything a bit—well, a bit shady about him, Jack?"

"No, never. I thought he was a pretty straight chap myself."

Bob picked up a paper knife and jabbed with it at the blotter. "I hope so, I'd hate to think he wasn't. He's been around with us all the year and Hensley says he never noticed anything till this morning in Cicero exam."

Jack sat down opposite Bob at the table.

"You mean something not quite straight?" he asked.

Bob nodded. He glanced at the open transom, walked over and closed it.

"You know these are Breck's first exams here at Standham. Well, Hensley says he caught him cribbing this morning. Says he couldn't be mistaken. Ned sat right next to him and the first thing that struck him wrong was that Breck seemed to be having an uncommon lot of trouble with his cuffs. He watched him after that off and on. Breck would write a while and then fumble at his cuffs, write some more, fumble some more, and so on. Ned didn't say anything because Breck finished before he was through. After thinking it over he decided to ask me if I'd ever seen anything of the kind."

"And you told him you hadn't, of course," said Jack.

"That's the queer thing. I had, but I never thought what it meant till Ned spoke. Oh, I didn't tell Hensley, I put him off. Now this is just between us two. You remember that written quiz in geometry two weeks ago?"

"Remember it? Well, I guess!" Jack's tone was rueful.

"Tough, wasn't it?" Bob sympathized. "I was studying away on the fifth proposition, trying to get it to look a bit familiar, racking my brains to think if I'd ever seen anything in the least like it and I was staring at Allen Breck part of the time—he sat two seats off from me, changed into my division for the day. I didn't really see him; you know how your eyes will sometimes take a photograph of a person while your brain doesn't seem to catch on to what he's doing at all, being busy about something else. I got that problem done after a fashion, finished my paper and handed it in and from that time till Ned spoke to me to-night I never thought of the thing again. Then all at once my brain woke up and it flashed over me that what Allen Breck was doing while I puzzled over that problem was just what Ned was telling me he'd seen. He'd write a while, fuss with his cuffs a bit and then write some more. I wonder whether the other fellows have noticed anything. I don't quite like to ask for fear I'd be putting it into their heads, you know."

“I’m in Breck’s math division,” said Jack, “and he doesn’t crib in class; at least I never noticed anything suspicious. He might, fast enough, and I not catch on. I don’t see much of what’s doing right under my nose in recitations; have troubles of my own there. But I’ll keep my eyes open to-morrow during the exam and see—what I see.” Jack strummed on the table with his fingers while he stared at the green shade on the drop light. “It looks bad, doesn’t it? What’s to be done if——”

“I don’t know. That’s a tough question. Bother the whole thing! Let’s drop it till we’re sure of our ground. If we don’t, we’ll flunk sure to-morrow.”

“Bob,” said Jack at noon the next day, “I’m afraid it’s so.”

Bob needed no more definite antecedent. He pushed back his book with a quick shove; these were days wherein few spare moments were allowed to go to waste. “What’d you see?”

“About what you and Hensley did. Breck studied his cuffs off and on all through math exam. I watched him. Once he caught me

looking and he got red all over. He finished first of anybody in class. It's downright queer."

"We haven't had anything like it since our first year here," said Bob.

"That fellow was caught cribbing from another's paper and was expelled," said Jack. "They're bound not to have any sneaks at Standham."

"I'll never forget the talk Mr. Wetherell gave us then. Remember, Jack, how he went on about boys who would be ashamed to put their hands in other fellows' pockets thinking it perfectly honest to stay on at school by stealing out of their classmates' brains? And about a fellow feeling insulted if you questioned his decency in sport who only thought he was mighty cute if he could cheat in the classroom and not be found out?"

A rap on the door announced Scrap. "Hello, you two alone? That's good. Let me put up your transom, will you? Oh, it's closed already. I've come on ugly business and I'm not going to waste any words in prelims. Have you spotted, either of you, anything queer lately about Allen Breck?"

Bob looked steadily at the questioner. "What's queer about him, Scrap?"

"Then you haven't? Can't be that it's all imagination, though. Fact is, some of the fellows have spoken to me about Breck and we've about decided that he—cheats."

"How?" asked Bob, still quietly.

"Notes on his cuffs. He's always consultin' 'em these days. Should think the profs would catch him at it; don't see how they can help it even if they do read most o' the time while we're sweatin' over their old exams. Oh, you have seen something o' the kind."

Scrap caught a swift interchange of looks between the roommates.

"Yes," said Bob, "more's the pity. You say other fellows have noticed it, too, Scrap?"

"Dozen, I guess, in and out o' the Crowd. Breck's little game's up. Question is, how are we goin' to shut him off? Can't we do it on the quiet somehow? We don't want the class's reputation muddied; I'd hate to have this business get out all over school. The fellows will do anything you say, Bob."

"I suppose there can't be any mistake,"

said Bob. "He's as good as confessed—flushed up over it—Jack'll tell you."

Bob strode to the window and stood there looking out. As president of the class he felt responsible for its good name. "I wouldn't have believed it of Breck," he thought. "To be sure he's new this year, but he knows we're on our honor here at Standham, he knows we're not watched and spied upon during exams as fellows are at some places. And he's always seemed as fair and square as any of us. Clever as he is too—but we can't overlook what so many have noticed."

He turned back from the window. "As long as the profs don't know this, I suppose it's in our hands. What do you say to a class-meeting at four-thirty? We've got to show Allen Breck what Standham thinks of this kind of thing, that we won't have it, but how to do it isn't any one fellow's business to say. Just spread the notice among the boys, omitting Breck, of course. Let's call in Hensley and divide up dormitories, so we won't leave out anybody else."

From mouth to mouth word of the class-meeting spread. In time the news reached Denslow.

"What's the meeting for?" he asked.

"To decide what we'll do about Breck," his informant explained. "He's been cheating in exams."

"Who says so?"

"Bob Farrar told me ——"

"Oh, it's Farrar, is it? I might have known. Yes, I'll be there."

As he turned away Denslow's heart was hot. Here was his opportunity to show up Bob Farrar. He made his way to a room he knew well in Horton. Notice of the class-meeting had preceded him. His entrance interrupted a buzz of subdued talk.

"What does Farrar know about whether Breck cheats or not?" demanded the newcomer. "Do you know it? Have you seen him cribbing? Have you even heard of anybody who's seen him?"

"No," said the boys. "No, it's news to us."

"How does Farrar come to know so much more than the rest of us?" went on Denslow. "I tell you I don't believe he does know. He's heard a story, maybe, and he jumps at the chance of playing with a muck-rake,

cleaning up the school, posing as the most honorable fellow at Standham. It's just another bid for your good opinions—glossed over so you think it's all done for the school. I don't believe this yarn about Breck. You wouldn't believe it if it didn't come from Bob Farrar. Breck isn't that kind. Ever noticed anything wrong with him yourselves?"

"No," the listeners acknowledged, "not a thing."

"But you'll go to this meeting and swallow just what Farrar tells you. I'll bet Breck doesn't get a chance to defend himself—Farrar won't give it to him. How long are you fellows going to let one boy run you? Farrar's Lambs, that's a good name for the class of 19—. It comes when it's called, does as it's told, eats out of Farrar's hand. Let's have minds of our own, for once. Let's go to this meeting determined to see fair play."

Thus Denslow in all singleness of heart abjured his classmates and the jealousy of popularity, always latent in a few spirits, sprang up to aid and abet him. Farrar had got to thinking that he could run the class, the boys in the room agreed. From this,

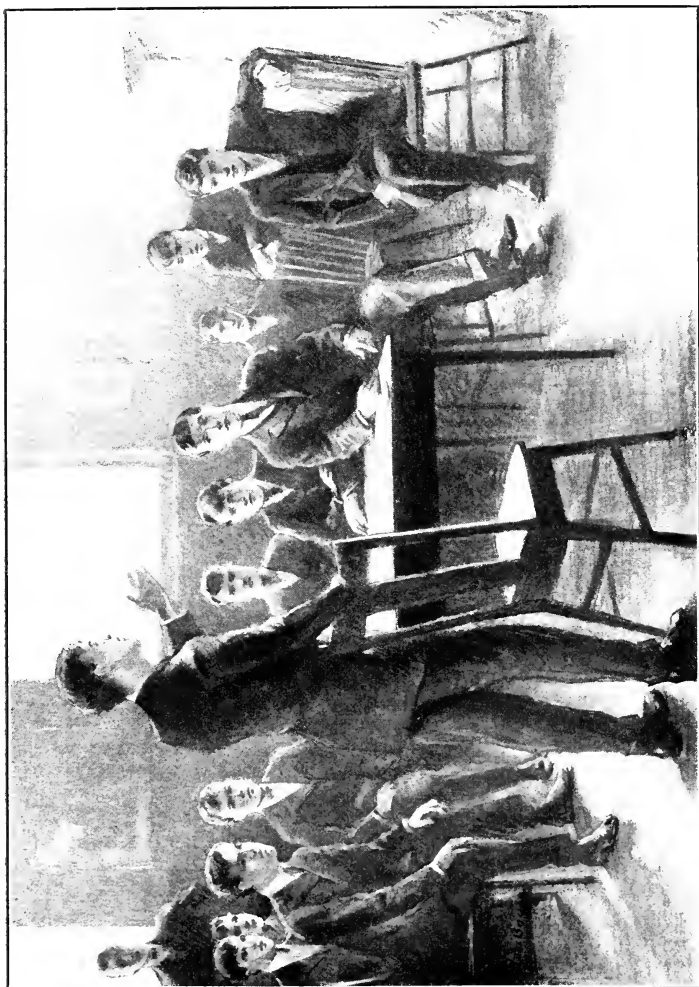
given a leader like Denslow, it was an easy step to open opposition.

The president was on his feet when Denslow and his supporters entered the class-meeting.

“You have all heard what these fellows say they’ve seen,” he was saying. “It’s too strong evidence to carry no weight with it. If it’s true, and we can’t doubt that it is, then we can’t afford to let this thing go by. That the faculty haven’t noticed it makes no difference. Standham stands for a clean slate, no cheating, no cribbing, no dirty tricks. We’re put on our honor when we come here ; we’re trusted to do the honest thing. If we prove ourselves untrustworthy and dishonorable there’s only one thing to look forward to, we’ll have to go back to the old system of faculty watch-dogs that they used to have ten years ago before Mr. Wetherell came here. I’ve heard talk about how affairs were then and I tell you, fellows, it’s nothing we want to come to. Mr. Wetherell has said it rests with us how long we keep the honor system. He believes it is the only decent way to govern schools and he wants us to help him prove that it will work. We have helped him so

far. It's been two years now since anything of this sort has happened at Standham. If we let this go now we'll be putting ourselves on the side of cheating and foul play, and we'll be making the way easy for more of it. We are upper classmen, pretty soon we'll be seniors, and the stand we take on this matter is going to affect school opinion next year. Junes and ju-mids always take their cues from the two upper classes. It rests with us to keep up the standard of Standham or to lower it. What are we going to do about it?"

The boys sat soberly for a minute after Bob's speech ended. This was a matter which touched them to the quick, since it touched the good faith of the class and the honor of the school. That it was a bad business they were all agreed, for during the past ten years there had grown up at Standham Academy a public opinion which demanded fair dealing in the classroom as well as on the athletic ground. Some had been a little startled at Bob's way of putting the matter. Breck was a jolly fellow, they had liked him; it seemed the affair was more serious than they had expected.



“AND YOU CALL THIS FAIR PLAY?”

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Shorty was rising to speak when on the last row of seats Denslow got to his feet.

“ Mr. President.”

“ Mr. Denslow.”

“ I’d like to inquire whether Breck has been asked to give any explanation of this cuff-business? ”

“ Not so far as I know.”

A sudden flush swept across Denslow’s face, his eyes darkened, his voice rang deep and angry. “ And you fellows come here to sit in judgment on a chap who doesn’t even know that he’s accused of anything! I met Breck on my way to this class-meeting; he told me he was going for a turn or two around the pond. He invited me to go along. There was nothing hangdogish about his air, no bluff and bravado. He didn’t know about this,” Denslow with a sweep of his arm indicated the listening boys. “ He didn’t know that while he was taking his ‘ turn or two ’ he’d be tried and convicted by his class without a hearing. And you call this fair play, fair dealing. Your president—our president, I suppose I ought to say—calls a meeting, hands out some talk, says the fellow’s

guilty, and asks you to deal a sentence instant.

“Why didn’t somebody go to Breck on the quiet, tell him what a few of his class had noticed and ask him to explain how it happened? But no, nothing would do but we must have a class-meeting, talk it all up, and vote to express him to Coventry or do something else along the sensational line. I’m only surprised it wasn’t thought necessary to call a mass meeting of the academy.

“Where were Breck’s friends? Hasn’t he any? Some of you have been thick enough with him up to now. I don’t claim to know him very well myself, but I’m for giving him the benefit of the doubt. If there’s nobody else ready I’ll make a motion. I move, Mr. President, that Allen Breck be called into this meeting and asked to give his version of this affair. He’s had a public accusation, let him have an equally public chance to defend himself.”

The scathing sentences ceased and the boys’ eyes turned again to the president. His face was white, but he held himself under control.

"You have heard Denslow's motion. Is it seconded?"

"Second the motion." The voices of two or three boys about Denslow mingled with Shorty's from the front row of chairs.

"Any remarks?"

"All in favor say aye. Those opposed, no. It is a vote. I will appoint Ned Hensley to go and find Breck, explain to him what is the cause of this meeting and ask him to come before us."

Ned Hensley departed for the pond, Bob sat down, and all over the room voices broke into earnest talk. Only the president in his chair before the tiers of seats and Denslow in his at the back of the room kept silent. Slowly the clock ticked off minutes. Fifteen had passed when the slamming of a door and footsteps in the corridor hushed the excited clamor. Ned Hensley slipped into his seat and Allen Breck came forward to the desk and faced his classmates. His lips were set, his eyes were very dark and bright. He swept the room with a quick glance and turned to Bob.

"You wished to see me, I believe."

"You have been told what this meeting was called for and why you were not notified," said the president.

"Yes, I've discovered that you all think I'm a cheat." Breck met Bob's clear gaze defiantly, held it for a minute and then his eyes passed to the others.

"We would like to have you convince us," said Bob quietly, "that we are wrong, Breck."

The boy straightened a little. "I don't know that I can do that. Maybe I am a cheat, I don't say I haven't been, but—I hear some of you saw me cribbing in math this morning. Take a look at those cuffs, Bob Farrar, I haven't changed 'em to-day."

Bob took a step forward and deliberately looked the cuffs over. There was no sign of pencil or ink or eraser mark on them. Breck moved slowly along the front row of seats. "Look carefully," he said. "Satisfy yourselves that I'm telling the truth."

When the examination was done he stepped back and faced the president. "If you hold once a cheat, always a cheat, then I'm one now, I suppose. I used to do it, I don't deny that. Everybody did at the school where I

came from, did it as naturally as we breathed. If you could cheat and not get caught you were pretty smart. I always used my cuffs. When I came here I stopped. I saw it wasn't the fashion at Standham ; it had been at the other place. Mr. Wetherell explained to me how things were done here and I watched you fellows to see whether what he said was really so. I found it was. You were on your honor here. I don't say the change wasn't rather tough at first, but I got used pretty soon to depending on my head instead of on my cuffs. Only when it comes to written things, exams and quizzes—I don't know that you'll believe me—I find my wits work better when I look down at 'em now and then. You see I used the cuff dodge mostly at exam times in that other school. Habit stuck, I suppose. But I haven't put any notes on 'em since I came here."

The president looked around the class. "When 19— makes a mistake it isn't afraid to own it," he said. "I shall take that to be the sense of this meeting unless I hear something to the contrary."

"Hear ! Hear !"

"That's the talk."

"Now you're shoutin'."

Without ceremony the class broke over parliamentary rules.

Bob turned again to the boy before him. "In the name of the class I beg your pardon, Breck, for this affair. We didn't do the straightforward thing and it was my fault. We ought to have gone right to you in the first place. Will you shake hands and let us try to make you forget it?"

Allen Breck looked doubtful. A deep stillness held the room, in the tension of the moment the boys almost stopped breathing.

"But—I used to cheat," he said at last.

"That doesn't matter," Bob answered. "It's what you do now that counts."

CHAPTER XV

BEFORE THE MEET

THE class-meeting broke up and most of it made an immediate rush for Breck. Bob slipped out during this onslaught. He had not gone far before Jack caught up with him. The two walked down to Stone in silence. Once they interchanged remarks.

“When we get home, kick me,” said Bob.

“I will, if you’ll do the same for me.”

Beyond this the situation seemed to present nothing worth saying. Jack was angry with himself for having fed the flame of Bob’s suspicion and more angry with Denslow for having spoken as he had in class-meeting. Bob’s thoughts were bitter. He, the president of the class, had been found guilty of condemning one of its members unheard. Denslow’s sarcastic reference to fair play rankled. Other sentences of his repeated themselves in Bob’s brain. “Why didn’t somebody go to Breck on the quiet?” “Where were his friends?” “I’m for giving him the benefit of the

doubt." Bob Farrar ought to have been the one to do that, he told himself. Instead he had left it for a newcomer, a fellow who had had only a few months of Standham life, to do the straightforward thing. Bob was ashamed. He had been hasty, he had jumped to a conclusion. Given that, all the rest followed, but he ought to have mistrusted the conclusion.

"I was so certain of the square deal we owed Standham," he thought, "that it made me stone blind to the fact that we owed Breck one, too. Bob Farrar, you make a pretty president, don't you? If the fellows don't punch your head for this, I will."

Still silent, the boys entered Stone and climbed the stairs. As speechless, they switched on the lights in the study. Both drew up chairs to the table and attacked their books. Soon feet began to race along the corridors, voices shouted, doors opened and shut. The class, returning from Centre Hall, was about to renew its attack on the strongholds of learning and this in time usually devoted to fun. Verily the season of examinations was upon the school.

Bob's French grammar was open at a page of verbs when Scrap burst in. "Bob," he cried, "I'm so everlastin'ly sorry, I—I could chew myself! Won't you throw me downstairs or something? 'Twould make me feel better if you would—honest Injun."

"Wanted! Somebody to thrash my roommate." Shorty appeared at the door, grasping Ned Hensley by the collar. "No chap without good muscle need apply. References required." Shorty would have joked, had the house been burning down.

"Do, somebody," said Ned. "I'd like to have you. You see I first put this notion into Bob's head ——"

"No, I did," interrupted Scrap.

Bob made a weary gesture of dismissal. "Drop it, can't you? The thing's done now. We let our green suspicions run away with us and made a bad blunder. I'm the one mostly to blame, you fellows left it to me, and I played idiot to the top notch. Maybe we can't ever undo it, but we're bound to try to."

Meanwhile in Centre Hall and all along the walks to the dormitories, the class was demanding its president.

"Where'd Bob light out to so quick?" asked Spud.

"Anybody seen Farrar?" Hall inquired.

"I tell you it took grit to do what he did this afternoon!" said Brassey.

"You bet!" chimed in Symonds. "Why, when Denslow was steaming away there I looked for an earthquake sure, but Bob took it like a clock."

"Farrar never crawls," added a voice. "When he finds out he's wrong he up and says so, straight out."

"Denslow laid it on a good deal thicker'n he had any call to, I'm thinking," said one.

"He's got it in for Bob fast enough," commented another. "That stuck out all through his speech."

"Well, Farrar's the fellow for this class every time," cried an enthusiast.

"Let's go over and tell him so," suggested somebody.

So it came about that a shower of knocks put an effectual period to Bob's last sentence.

"Can't stop. Must get back to boning," cried the boys. "Just came to give you the glad hand, Farrar."

"Bully for you, Bob! We'll bank on you to the last ditch."

"The whole class is behind you all right."

The words warmed Bob's heart. Neither he nor the speakers knew the sentiments of a certain group of senior-middlers from Horton. These went home after the class-meeting, distrust in their hearts. Denslow's words had taken root. Here was a clear-headed, first-rate sort of a fellow who disliked Bob Farrar. Doubtless he had his reasons and good ones. Thereafter the class was divided in its allegiance.

Ten minutes after the boys clattered downstairs, Breck stuck his head in the door. He found Bob and Jack alone and studying furiously. "What I'll be doing in a minute," he sighed. "Don't get up. Wanted to tell you it's all right, Farrar. Don't take it hard. Every fellow makes mistakes, I guess. I'm only glad this was a mistake. So long."

"But just the same," announced Scrap after supper in the presence of a fraction of the Crowd, "Denslow needn't have been so high and mighty this afternoon. We'd have seen

his point if he hadn't sharpened it quite so fine."

"There wasn't any call for those heavy guns of his," put in Hunt. "He'd better have spiked 'em."

"Denslow was right," Bob said staunchly.

His lips spoke what his head knew, but his heart still felt sore. Denslow's attitude toward him was something new to Bob. Never in his school days had he experienced its like before. In his first years toleration, kindness, at the worst indifference, had been the portion meted out to him by the upper class boys; among his own age and size, goodwill and friendliness had never failed him. Now he met open dislike and this from one of his class and a boy he liked. "For I do like him," Bob said to himself. Even when Denslow was slinging those contemptuous words at him in class-meeting Bob had, deep down under his anger, felt this liking. The contempt had cut and had left a sting behind it, but he could not help admiring the boy who had stood up, tall and angry, and had spoken his mind straight from the shoulder. "But he hasn't any use for me," thought

Bob, "and I don't expect he ever will have. Denslow's a pretty good hater."

Denslow himself had not entirely escaped the comments of his classmates.

"Lucky you kept your head, Ned!" "Good thing, that motion of yours," commended his friends.

"But let me give you one piece of advice," said his chum when he got him alone. "Curb that tongue of yours when you're talking in public. Even if you and Farrar don't hit it off very well, that was a little too bad, you know, the way you went on this afternoon."

"I got mad, I grant you." Denslow faced the other squarely. "In my opinion there was provocation enough."

"But you've got to acknowledge that Farrar's quick to say so when he finds out he's made a mistake. Lots of fellows wouldn't have given in that they were wrong."

"Oh, yes, he knows how to get out of a bad situation when he finds himself in it. There's nothing slow about Farrar, I'll go that far with you."

The other boy looked at Denslow keenly. "Of course I don't know what you've got

against him," he said. "But I'll bet you're barking up the wrong tree, Ned."

"I'd like to think so, but—I've got to believe the evidence of my own eyes."

Denslow's estimation of Bob Farrar, so swiftly formed on the night of his impetuous rush to Bob's room after the game with Conway, had become all the more firmly fixed because of the liking he had just begun to entertain toward his rival. The evening before when he had left the study in Stone after his confession of last year's disgrace, he had gone with warm admiration for Bob Farrar. The sudden revulsion of his opinion had set it the more unchangeably. He looked on Bob as on a hypocrite and a sham. To be sure, he was at a loss to reconcile this view with all Bob's actions. His own notion of the other's character did not always fit in well with appearances. Bob's attitude to Tom Thompson made one of these discrepancies; Denslow had owned to himself his inability to dovetail these together. But his old prejudice had returned in full force with the Breck episode and he was not a boy given to distrusting his own decisions.

As time wore gradually away, Bob Farrar and Ned Denslow avoided each other's company as much as possible. The dreaded examination season went by and left most of the Crowd, as it was wont to leave them, on the safe side of the passing mark. Only Shorty found himself in an unfamiliar position. For once in his life he had no conditions.

"Oh, yes," he answered soberly as he received his friends' congratulations, "it's a great and glorious state, this of the conditionless. I take your word for all its beauties, but a little—just a little—lacking, don't you think so?"

"Homely and lonesick, Shorty?"

Shorty wagged his head. "Maybe I'll get used to it in time, never been here before, you know. Gives me just at first that fish-out-o'-water, cannibal-at-a-fruit-stand feeling. Fact. Unpleasant sensation, this of being out of your element."

But in spite of his mournful words Shorty was inwardly pleased. He was still more pleased with something Mr. Wetherell saw fit to say to him a day or two later, but he took

care that no hint of the principal's commendation should reach the Crowd. Shorty would as soon have been caught picking pockets as cherishing a compliment on the improvement in his studies.

After the tenterhooks of examination week the boys settled down to the uninterrupted enjoyment of winter sports. Frost gripped Standham long that year, but at last there came days when the air was warm with the foretaste of stirring life, when the wind blew softly from a balmy south and spring began to lay hold on the land. Then in sheltered corners of the academy buildings little boys squatted over marbles; tops gyrated on the concrete walks; baseball bats were brought out and looked over. Soon impromptu nines, made up of youngsters, floundered about in damp fields with shrill shouting. All over the campus at odd minutes balls slipped from the pockets of more accustomed players and passed with swift hard impact from hand to hand.

The May athletic meet, casting a long shadow before, brought out runners jogging across country as soon as the snow was off

the ground. Gid Sloane and Pitkin, getting into practice for long distance events, swung through their three or four miles daily at an easy pace. Jack and Hunt, with an eye to middle distance running were out, rain or shine. With these walked or trotted many others, laying in lung-power and endurance, building themselves into sound physical condition. And with them, Bob sometimes at his side, jogged little Tom.

"A month of this," Bob told him, "and we'll be ready for the track."

"What are you going to enter him for, Bob?" asked Ned Hensley one night when the boys were gathered as usual in the rallying place of the Crowd. The talk had turned on the annual May meet with Conway.

"What I'll enter him for is good, Ned. But I shan't advise him to butt into the big events, if that's what you mean. There are always junior races for the youngsters, you know. I reckon Tom will have sense enough to stick to his own size."

"Those little shavers hit a pretty good clip now and then," said Jack, "but I shouldn't wonder if Tom worked up to their pace before

the tenth of May. My, wouldn't he feel big to win out in a race with Conway!"

"I bet he does it, too!" Scrap cried. "I tell you, Bob, three months ago I didn't have much faith in his amountin' to a row of peanut shucks in a race. I've changed my mind now. He's makin' good all right. But I'd never have believed it, never, if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes. How you've worked the trick beats me!"

"It's Tom that worked it," laughed Bob. "I've only shown him a few things. In the first place he was built to run. Pluck's done the rest, Scrap—pure grit."

"Well, here's to his breakin' the tape in May!" cried Scrap.

"We ought to see some pretty slick stunts at the meet this year," remarked Hunt. "They say Conway's got a clipper and no mistake in a fellow named Fuller. He beats their last year's man hollow at the hundred yards."

"Hear what's going to happen to you, Bobby," said Shorty. "Going in for that?"

Bob nodded. "I guess so."

"Oh, Bob'll pull a bunch of cups out o' this, don't you fret, Ned. He'll have to put

up another shelf to hold 'em all." Hunt strolled over and inspected the collection beside the silver clock. "The high jump's yours, of course, Jack."

"I'm meaning to try for it," said Jack modestly.

"Huh, he's been workin' all winter in the gym," Scrap declared. "You can put him down a winner again this year sure unless Conway raised somebody better'n that old Foote o' theirs. And if they do, I'm ready to back up Jackstraws."

"Say, how many of this crowd are calculating to cover themselves with glory on the tenth o' May?" Shorty inquired.

"Can't say about the glory, Shorty," answered Bob, "but I've seen most of 'em getting ready on the quiet all winter, practicing in the gym. Hunt here's mum enough about it, but he's got an eye on the hammer, or I'm no good at a guess, and Spud's going in for the hurdles, if signs count."

"My benighted roommate thinks he can vault the festive pole," said Shorty.

"He'll vault you for practice if you don't look out," threatened Ned.

"Scrap's jogging 'cross lots like a miler," continued Spud.

"And Breck's been punching the bag all winter," put in Bob. "Going to try the shot, Breck?"

"I used to be able to do a little something at that," confessed Breck.

Voice after voice threw in contributions.

" 'With all this array of brawn and talent,' as the billboards would say," drawled Shorty, "I don't see much use in Conway's having us over. We might telephone 'em the records. Save time."

"Huh!" Scrap's tone was derisive. "Haven't you heard they claim they'll beat us by fifty points?"

"You don't say!" Shorty's face was solemnly innocent in expression. "Don't they study arithmetic over there? Even I can figure out closer than that. Why, we've got a dozen events here in this room, let alone what the rest of the school can do. I don't see many points left for Conway."

A laugh greeted Shorty's summary of the outlook. "I wish there wasn't any such thing as losing!" Spud cried. "Just s'pose we

really did have a round dozen nailed for Standham ! ”

“ Every fellow’s in for something,” said Jack, “ except Shorty. What are you going to do, Beanpole ? ’Fess up.”

“ Watch you.”

“ Lazy ! Lazy ! ” shouted the boys.

“ Not a bit of it. Hasn’t somebody got to act as audience ? Besides,” Shorty’s tone was speculative, “ I’m a modest kind of floweret, you know,” here he dodged a pillow, “ and those stunts are a little too—ah—public for a person of my retiring disposition.” The boys groaned. “ But,” continued Shorty cheerfully, “ just between friends, in a private way, I’ll wrestle any one of you to a fall in two minutes.”

Hunt immediately closed with this offer. When quiet had been restored, the study table returned to its original position, two or three chairs picked up and the contents of the wastebasket thrust back into its capacious depths, the talk veered back to the subject of track and field athletics.

“ Have any of you fellows heard,” asked Jack, “ that there’s talk of a quadrangular meet this year ? ”

"No! Where?"

"Who else is in it?"

"When?"

"Nothing's settled," Jack explained. "The Athletic Association's had a circular letter, that's all. Derry High sent it out. Place of the meet to be determined by lot the first year, they want it to be a regular thing, you see. Time, last of May. They've sent to Conway, Oak Hill and to us. 'Twould be good fun, wouldn't it?"

"You're right!" cried Ned. "But what about our meet with Conway?"

"Oh, if this big one could be pulled off I guess that would be given the go-by after a while," said Jack. "Not such a long while, too, maybe."

"Say, I think that would be great!" exclaimed Hunt.

"Something like, wouldn't it be?" said Bob.

"Is that what the Athletic Association meeting is for?" Spud asked. "I see one's called for next Tuesday."

"Yes," answered Jack, "we'll all have a chance to speak our minds and then vote for or against."

"Well, I reckon there isn't much difference of opinion right here in this room, and if the whole school's like us ——" began Breck.

"It's a go," Scrap finished.

"Provided the other schools think so, too," said Jack.

"Well, won't they?" asked Ned. "Unless they're made up of chuckle-headed imbeciles."

"Which they are if they don't vote the way we do," finished Shorty.

"Anyhow," said Bob, "we've got one meet that's a sure thing for all of us."

"What's that? With Conway?"

"The prelims here at Standham."

"Wet blanket!" cried Ned. "Aren't we all going to weather those, according to Shorty's Conway-beating arithmetic?"

"I say," asked Breck suddenly, "is Denslow going in for any of these events? Somebody's told me he's a dandy at the hurdles."

"Guess he won't have much time for meets," Hunt answered.

"Why?"

"Don't you know? They say he's turning out a cracker-jack at baseball. Sure to be on the team."

Two or three of the boys glanced at Bob. He had played on the last spring's nine. How would he and Denslow hit it off together now?

"Well, Bob's equal to both."

"I guess not this year, Ned," said Bob quietly. "I'm likely to have my hands full enough with the meet."

After the boys had gone Jack turned to his roommate. "You meant to play, Bob."

"If Denslow's such a good one they won't need me, Jack. And—you know it wouldn't be very comfortable for either of us, as things stand."

But to no one except Jack could Bob ever be induced to confess that he did not play baseball that spring because Denslow was on the team, though more than one boy figured out the reason in his own mind.

CHAPTER XVI

TOM RUNS HIS FIRST RACE

“BOBBY!”

Shorty, balanced precariously on the window ledge below, adroitly tossed a battered baseball into the study above his own. Bob's head instantly appeared where the ball had entered. “Hello! What's doing?”

“Good, you're there. Anything on?”

“Not for half an hour. Promised to time Thompson at five.” It was the week before the meet with Conway, and between his own and Tom's practice, Bob was a busy boy.

“Come on down to the field and see the Fat Lady.” Though Shorty dealt widely in nicknames, their appropriateness did not always concern him.

“Who's the Fat Lady?” asked Bob.

“Why, the new baseball freak, of course. Come along.”

“All right. I've only heard what the fellows say. Be right down.”

Feet crossed the room up-stairs, the door banged and Bob clattered to the second floor. Shorty ran his arm through Bob's and the two took the next flight three steps at a time.

"What's the matter with 'Fat Lady'?" asked Shorty as they tramped across the green grass. "Don't the fellows all talk about him as though he'd just got loose from a side-show? I'll call him the Living Skeleton, if you like that any better, or the Two-Headed Calf, or the Snake Charmer, or the Siamese Twins. Anything to please. 'I tell you Denslow's a prodigy! Why, he's a—a phenomenon!'" Shorty mimicked Spud's excited tones. "Fancy Spud's calling anybody a prodigy and a phenomenon! And then you come down on me hot and heavy for such nice little easy words as Fat Lady! I wouldn't have thought it of you, B. F."

Bob laughed. "Well, you won't have to pay for a ticket to this side-show."

"Lucky!" breathed Shorty. "For I'm broke again, Bobby, broke and in debt. But next pay day's in sight, glory, hallelujah! And I told the pater a little extra wouldn't come unhandy."

"You're a broken reed, Shorty."

"Yes, a busted beanpole, but he's used to it, is the pater. Here we are. Now I'm going to find out whether the Fat Lady's stuffed with sawdust or the real thing."

"Oh, I guess he's real all right. The boys are wild over him. They say we've got everything in sight this season just because of Denslow. Best baseball player Standham's ever had."

"There you go," said Shorty, "just like the rest, and you've never even seen him practice. Nobody's seen him play. I've heard quoting enough. I'm going to look for myself."

The two joined a group of boys. The second team was at bat and behind the home plate squatted Denslow, masked, padded, and gloved.

"They're trying Sims for pitcher," explained one of the spectators. "He's new to the first nine, and it's sort o' rattled him. Pitched wild at first, but Denslow steadied him down. He's just a ripping catcher. Nothing gets by him!"

While Bob and Shorty watched, Sims suc-

ceeded in putting out his man and another came to the bat. This one made a safe hit, and encouraged by his example, a third started in to do likewise. Instead he bettered his predecessor's accomplishment and hit out a two bagger. With a man on second, another on third and only one out, prospects looked bright for the second nine.

"They'll score sure."

"They've got nothin' but goose eggs so far."

"Just you watch Denslow ; he ain't goin' to let that chap in."

"Say, Sims is getting rattled again."

It was undeniably true. The pitcher gave the next boy at the bat a base on four balls that brought into play all the catcher's skill.

"Look at him ! Look at him !" cried the watchers. "See him scoop that ball up out o' the dirt ?"

"He picks 'em down from the sky 'bout as easy."

"Mm-m-m, ain't he a daisy !"

"Yi—yi—yi !" An excited yell broke from the fringe about the diamond. "D'you see that ? Did you now ? That's corking quick play !"

The batsman had hit the ball a gentle tap and it had rolled lazily toward the pitcher. All around the diamond runners were instantly in motion. The scrub team's man on third base hurled himself toward home; at the same time the runner on second sprinted for third. Sims' fingers closed on the ball, he straightened up and hesitated, lost a good second by that and then threw wildly in the direction of the home plate. The ball went high. Denslow jumped for it. His hand closed on it in mid-air and his arm swept downward in a quick swing just as the runner in a cloud of dust slid for the plate. Then, as though a part of the same motion, the ball left Denslow's hand in a straight swift line for third base. The third baseman caught it and the inning was over.

A volley of cheers came from the watching boys.

"If he can do that stunt in a game, put two men out like that ——" said one.

"He can," declared another. "Denslow's not the sort to get rattled."

Bob's eyes were glowing with admiration. "No sawdust about him, Shorty!" he said. "He's the best ever."

Shorty nodded. "Yes, he seems to be 'it' fast enough. Yard wide, fast color, no imitation on the market."

"And we thought him fairly good at football!" cried one of the boys standing near.

"Well, he's found his level now all right, and it's at the top o' the heap on the diamond."

Bob glanced at his watch. "I'm five minutes late," he said. "Tom'll be waiting. Glad you brought me down here, Shorty, I've meant to come for a fortnight. 'Bye."

"So long, Bobby. I've got to stay and watch the Fat Lady. Always hated to leave the dime museum."

"You'd better be careful how you sling that name around," warned Bob.

Shorty's solemn face took on an impish cast. "Think so? I guess not. 'It's only Shorty,' you know."

And Bob, aware that this was quite true and that the school would laugh at any drollery Shorty might perpetrate, with no thought of malice behind the words, where indeed none lurked, took himself off.

He found Tom waiting for him, and be-

cause not even baseball practice with a star player behind the batsman could overshadow an athletic meet so near at hand as the coming week, he found other boys loitering in Tom's vicinity. The school's interest in the junior-middler had continued through the spring and little Tom promised to be a prime favorite at the meet. "We'll start him off with a good round yell, anyhow, beat or no beat," the boys asserted.

Now as Bob, watch in hand, stood by to time Tom's speed several of these onlookers strolled up.

"Pretty good for such a youngster," said one.

"How's his time compared with last year's?" asked another.

"Even with that," said Bob. "He's as fast as the junior winner a year ago."

"Oh, then he's sure of his race," said the first speaker. "Think so, don't you?"

"I wouldn't like to say that. We don't know what Conway may have up its sleeve this spring. They'll try to better last year's records, if they can, of course."

Jack Truman, tennis racket in hand,

crossed the grass to his roommate's side and studied the running boy silently.

"Good form," he commented at last.

Tom finished his distance with a spurt and Bob clicked his watch shut with satisfaction. He waited for Tom to slow down gradually into a walk and while he waited one of the group put a sudden question.

"I hear that quadrangular meet we were all so keen about has fallen through, Truman. How'd it happen?"

Jack had recently been elected president of the Athletic Association and was become therefore a person to be applied to for information on such matters.

"Conway wouldn't go in."

"Why? Scared?"

Jack tossed a tennis ball into the air and caught it with his free hand. "Better not let any of 'em hear you say that. It might hurt their feelings."

"Then it's really all off?" came the question.

"Looks like it," said Jack. "Not officially squashed, but sort o' hanging fire. You know what that generally means."

"Everybody but Conway wanted it, didn't they?" a boy was asking as Bob turned away to Tom.

"That was first-rate," he said. "This last week's work shows all right. You've found your stride now; don't try to lengthen it much. A fellow can always get best results with what's his own naturally, not copied from another. Day after to-morrow's Saturday — Let's see, can you manage to get up early that once? If you're out here by six we may get a chance at the track without an audience."

"I'll be here," said Tom promptly.

"That will make your last day of training. Three off before a contest is the rule, you know. Saturday morning then at six o'clock."

And Saturday morning at six sharp saw the two boys on the track.

"Now pretend you're starting in a real race and let's see what you can do," commanded Bob. "I'll give the word. On your mark. Set—go!"

Tom darted forward.

As he dashed on Bob watched him critically. The work of the spring had told and in

the right direction. Tom ran lightly, coming down with elasticity on the front of the foot, flat to the track. His body was inclined a trifle forward, his chin was well in, his arms swung easily from the elbows. As far as Bob could judge, there were no waste motions in his stride. Everything about him made for the front. He neither kicked up his heels behind nor let his arms swing backward. There was nothing to counteract the speed of his dash ahead. As he watched, Bob felt proud of his pupil.

"You want first of all, Tom, to get away quickly," he said when the run was finished. "It's a scramble for the pole generally in a race of this sort. And then hang on and keep ahead. Don't worry about where the other fellows are, forget about 'em. Keep your mind on your stride and finish as strong as you can. Don't let anybody get by you, if you can help it—that's understood, of course. Now try starting two or three times. It's the start that does the business, you know."

"He's pretty quick," Bob said to himself, "but that's where the trouble will come, if there is any. Too late to do anything more

about it anyhow. I wish there'd been somebody to put us both on to that starting dodge a little better, though. The fellows say I'm a dabster at it, but I'm not. I know I could get away quicker if I had somebody to show me a thing or two. But the gym instructor's as good at the crouching start as he is at coaching the football squad, and that's not saying much. Gid had to do it all last fall until Mr. Davenport came. Don't see what they keep such a stuffed doll as that gym fellow here for! We need an A number one, who understands his whole business, outdoors as well as in. H'm, Tom got off that time better'n I've ever seen him. Guess he's done all he ought for this morning."

"'Nuff, Tom," he called.

Tom came up panting and hot, and Bob promptly trotted him over to the gymnasium.

"How'd I do, Bob?" he asked anxiously as they went.

"First-rate," said Bob cheerfully. "Better than Thursday, and I thought that was good enough. Under the shower with you, youngster. We'll talk later."

When Tom emerged, dressed, the five was

ringing before breakfast. The boys could hear its tinkle as they came down the gymnasium steps. They strolled slowly across the grass.

"You deserve to win, Tom," Bob said. "But whether you win or lose you can be proud of one thing, you've made yourself into a runner no school need be ashamed of. In your case that hasn't been the easiest thing to do. You started handicapped."

Tom looked up at the boy beside him. "It's all your doing, I never could have by myself, Bob." His voice was eager and earnest. "If I knew all the words in the dictionary I couldn't ever thank you enough."

Bob reddened. "Oh, hold on. If you talk about throwing dictionaries at me I'll have to clear out. Now, mind," he hurried on, "you're to do nothing more but a little regular exercise to keep your muscles in trim. And don't think about the meet any more than you can help. Wednesday'll be time enough for that, when it's here. If your mind gets to running on it, go hunt up some fellows or drop around to the study. I'll keep you jumping on some other subject." They had reached the fork in their paths. "Pater coming?"

Tom's face clouded. "He can't after all. He wanted to, but some business has come up—whatever'd it want to come now for?—and he's got to see to it straight off. It's going to keep him in New York over Wednesday."

"Hard luck. Better next time, maybe. Don't forget what I've told you."

The two separated on their way to breakfast.

Later in the morning, when Tom went for his mail, he found a letter postmarked New Haven waiting for him. At intervals all through the spring the boy had reported his progress to his Cousin Philip Dane, the runner, and once in a while the college man had answered these letters. Now when Tom saw the big square handwriting on the envelope his heart thumped almost as hard as it did when he let himself think much about the coming meet. He hurried away to an empty staircase where he could read undisturbed. His fingers shook a bit as he tore open the envelope. What could Phil be writing about? Was it possible he might be coming up for Wednesday? Tom longed for some one of his own kin to see him run in a real live-boy race, his first.

The letter was not long, just a single sheet, his cousin's letters seldom were more than that. Tom's eyes ran swiftly through the first lines, then they traveled more slowly.

"So this meet comes next week. Standham against Conway, is it? I'd come up and see you run your race, if it weren't for a little trip some of the fellows have planned that I'm promised for. Good luck to you, Tom! Go in and let the other runners see your heels—but not thrown up too high for good form, you understand. Rather a bad metaphor, that, for a racer, isn't it? But you catch my drift. Go in and beat. Rah! Rah! Rah! Thompson! I'm downright sorry I can't hear the boys yell it and help yell it myself. Again good luck to you. P. DANE."

Tom read the note three times. He refolded it carefully and put it in the jaggedly torn envelope. Of course Phil couldn't come, he had been silly to imagine such a thing even for a minute. But next to his coming was his sending this letter. The boy emptied his securest pocket of its miscellaneous contents and stowed the note safely away in it. Then he walked off to his next recitation, whistling.

That letter Tom viewed in the light of a talisman. If Phil thought there was the ghost of a chance for him, surely he might win on Wednesday. He carried it in his pocket by day and slipped it under his pillow by night. It heartened him mightily to feel of it once in a while. When the great Wednesday came he changed it from one coat to another and wore it over to Conway. His fingers closed over the mussed envelope as he followed Bob from the train.

CHAPTER XVII

A VISITOR AT STANDHAM

THOSE who were to take part in the track meet piled into a waiting barge that started off briskly up the road leading from Conway Depot to Old Conway, the village where the school was situated. The rest of the Standham delegation straggled along on foot, ahead of, beside and behind the horses. Gradually the barge drew away from the trampers. Each group as it fell behind bandied shouts with the boys who rode.

"Tell 'em we're coming."

"Don't try to pass yourselves off as the whole show!"

"Let on there's plenty o' the right color behind you."

"Say, we'll give their old school one good coat o' purple before we go home."

Shorty lifted up his voice at this and paraphrased through his megaphone,

"We want to see a purple school,
We long have hoped to see one."

So tell 'em that we've come to-day
To see as well as be one."

Tom, snugly wedged between Bob Farrar and Jack Truman, pinched himself inquiringly. Were they real, the jokes, the laughter, the good-natured fire of raillery directed against the barge?

"There's Farrar now. He's going to walk off with the whole meet," shouted a boy.

"Oh, I'll not be grasping," Bob called back. "I'll leave a few scraps for the other fellows."

"Scraps!" cried Symonds. "Hear him! Hayes, why don't you punch his head for that?"

Scrap, perched on high beside the driver, grinned cheerfully. "Can't risk it now, might be bad for my form, you know. Wait till we get home."

"Give me the Empire Express," cried somebody. "Get on to his mile a minute gait to-day, fellows. Rah for Sloane!"

"Say, that's good!" echoed several voices. "The Empire State's a record smasher, alias Gid Sloane."

"What about T. T.?" asked Hall. "Tom

the Terror. We're looking for you to scare those Conway toddlers stiff-kneed, Thompson."

Again Shorty raised his megaphone. "Three-times-three for Thompson!" he commanded. "May he beat 'em or bust!"

The blood throbbed in Tom's temples. The short sharp bark of the yell thrilled him. That cheer was for him, the school was lumping him in with the other boys, the boys who were used to track meets and cheers. "Beat or bust" he would, Tom vowed.

His glance ranged over the barge load. There was Gid Sloane, the school's acknowledged leader. Last year he had broken the interscholastic record for the mile run, Tom remembered hearing. Everybody expected him to better his time to-day. Near him sat Pitkin, cool and easy as always, looking as though nothing could ever ruffle or excite him. Further down the line Spud and Ned Hensley were talking busily together. But not all the members of the Crowd who had hoped to be there rode in the barge. Turning to look back at the mob of boys behind, Tom saw Hunt. He had failed in the preliminary contests held at Standham, yet cheer-

fully enough he was trudging through the dust, one of that noisy majority headed by Shorty and his megaphone. If he could not compete with his muscle for the honor of the school, he could at least help out-yell Conway.

As he sat there, seeing these things, trying to realize that he was actually a part of what he saw, there came over little Tom a swift sense of the solidarity of the school, of the loyalty of these boys to Standham. He could not have expressed it in words even to himself, but it tightened his throat and made him swallow rather hastily; a feeling that after all it was Standham that mattered, not he himself so much as he had thought, and that if a boy could not do what he would for the school there was still left him the opportunity not to sulk or fuss, but to do what he could. It was a sudden feeling and it seemed somehow too big for him. He could not keep it with him long, though he tried. The race, his race, would come to the front in his thought and claim an importance for itself that he knew it did not deserve. He must win it, he must. His whole happiness—more than that, his self-respect depended on it.

And Tom knew it was not quite so much for Standham that he cared to win as for himself. Then all at once he awoke to the fact that the barge had stopped and that the boys were jumping out. He followed them and found himself at the entrance to Conway's athletic field.

The clouds which had been gathering through the earlier hours of the morning had settled down in a gray canopy, only now and then shot through with a flash of sunshine. The wind blew from the east and whipped about their sticks the yellow banners that fluttered from the north side of the grandstand. It loomed before Tom, a very large grandstand and very full of people. To his excited first glance they danced up and down in dazzling lines of color. When he ventured a second look he saw this was the effect of gay bobbing hats and billowing skirts of girls. A third inspection enabled him to pick out some boys, he found there were solid blocks of them in places, and to distinguish that the south end of the stand was empty. The blare of horns, a confused buzz of talk and laughter accented now and then by a cheer, floated across the field.

The shouting broke out in earnest when the Standham delegation appeared and headed for the empty end of the stand. Yells and counter yells barked back and forth, megaphones came into play and the give and take of taunts began. Conway told Standham politely that the meet was hers from the start and asked the visitors what they thought they had come for. Standham as confidently advised Conway to wait and see. While the newcomers scrambled to seats and shook out their lines of purple banners Shorty waged a wordy war with a thick set young fellow in the middle of Conway's section. The thick-set boy was equipped with a yellow cap and a very large megaphone through which he bellowed slurs at Standham. Shorty possessed the advantage of him in a wider acquaintance with the dictionary and a more picturesque way of using it. The matter ended with Shorty's predicting the "yaller head" would be talking out of the other side of his "oracular aperture" before night.

Then Standham swept in with its Rickety brax coax coax and Conway set itself to drown her out with a

Razzle dazzle ! Razzle dazzle !
Ric ! Sac ! Bang !

until bedlam fairly broke loose. The horns blared all at once, the girls waved their yellow flags wildly and the grandstand became again to Tom just a mass of dancing colors.

He wondered how many it held ; hundreds, thousands even, seemed to him to crowd it now. The thought that before all these eyes he was to put to the test the work of the winter, to measure his dreams by the standard of hard reality, gave him for a moment a queer sick feeling.

“ A bit shaky ? ” asked Bob as they crossed to the benches reserved for the Standham athletes. “ Never mind. You’ll be cool as a cucumber when it comes to the race.”

Tom sat down and listened to the talk about him. He did not join in it, he had no heart for company. To him this meet meant more than to the others. As he listened he detected a strained note in a voice here and there. Two or three boys kept up a fire of poor jokes and others laughed immoderately over them. Some fell silent as the time drew on ; one or two bit their lips nervously.

Bob came over to Tom again before the meet began. "All right?" he asked.

The smaller boy lifted his big brown eyes to his friend's face. "Yes, Bob," he answered quietly.

Then the hundred yard dash was called and Bob hurried off. He was entered for this. Tom got up and pushed his way nearer the track. There he saw Bob crouched for the start, resting easily on one knee, his fingertips on the mark. In line with him were three other boys.

"That's Fuller," Tom heard somebody say, "that black-haired chap next Farrar."

"He's the only one we're afraid of," another voice spoke. "Conway's given out that he's a great gun."

Tom had heard of Fuller. He studied the black-haired figure.

"See that back of his, will you?" went on the first speaker. "And those long legs."

"Looks the sprinter, doesn't he?" commented the second. "Well, here's to hoping Farrar beats him!"

"Set!"

At the word the runners threw their weight

forward. Bob's knee came up from the ground, his head was back. The pistol cracked and the four plunged forward.

From the start it was a race between Fuller and Bob Farrar, with the other two boys out of the running. Fuller got into his pace the smallest fraction of time before Bob and thereby gained a trifling advantage. But in short sprints such trifles are not to be despised. At the middle of the dash he was slightly in the lead and hurling himself forward with all the speed of his long legs. Bob came next, running cleanly, breathing easily. At three-quarters, Bob had forged ahead and the two were neck and neck. Tom strained for a sight of the finish. The grandstand was on its feet, purple and yellow streamers waving.

"Come on, Fuller!"

"Hit her up, Farrar!"

"Spurt, man, spurt!"

"Bob's ahead!"

"No, no, it's Fuller!"

To the confusion Tom joined his own voice and did not know it.

"Go it, Bob! Oh, Bob, go it!" he shrilled.

Then a cheer swelled wilder, louder than

the rest, but indistinguishable in its wording.

"Which beat?" implored Tom of the taller boys beside him.

"Looked like Conway's man from here. Tell you in a minute, youngster. What's that? Farrar? Hurrah! What's the matter with Standham?"

From the grandstand volleyed the cheers.

"Farrar! Farrar!! FARRAR!!!"

"Standham! STANDHAM!"

In the vicinity of the yellow flags temporary quiet had fallen. On the south side the shouting boys slapped each other on the back and hopped up and down in a frenzy of joy. The boys near Tom did likewise. Standham was mad with delight.

"By how much?" Tom's informant shouted his question at Pitkin leisurely making his way back from the finish of the race.

"Oh, two inches, perhaps."

"Whew, but that was close!"

"What was the time?"

"Farrar, ten and two-fifths seconds," said Pitkin.

"Good!"

Tom's heart thumped joyously. He heard the next event called, but he paid little heed, for around him boys were discussing Bob.

"He's a corking all-round athlete," they agreed.

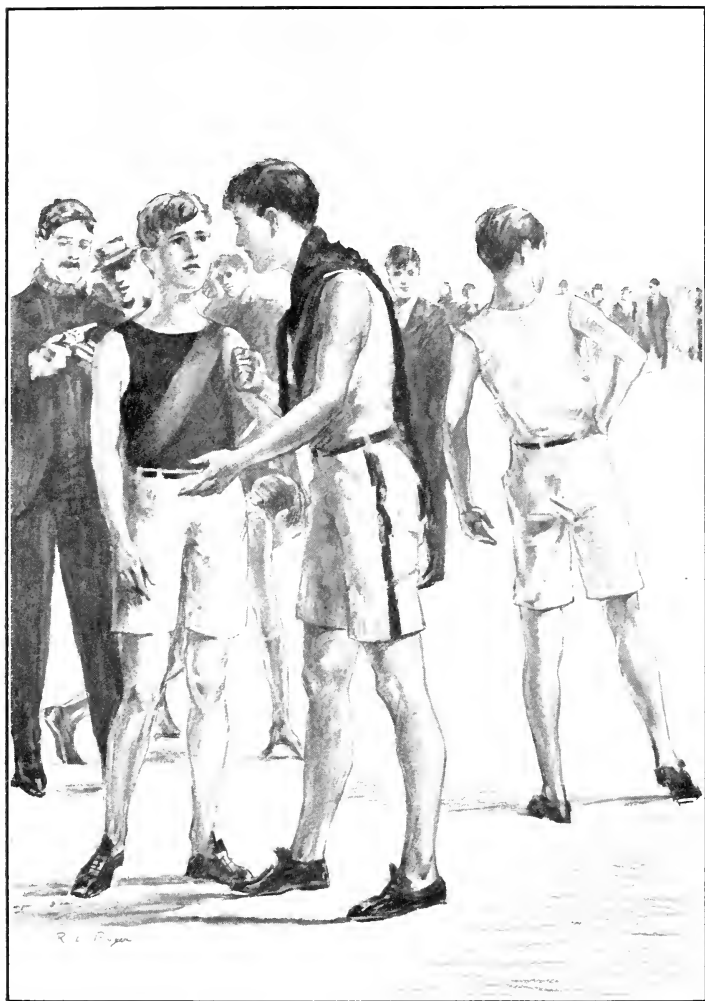
"Fact," said one. "I guess he can do more stunts well than any other fellow in school."

"Sprinter, hurdler, broad-jumper, etc., etc., etc.," put in another.

"Comes in again pretty soon, doesn't he?" questioned a third.

"Oh, he'll be on 'bout all the time," said the second, "can't help it. He's entered for so many events."

Of the other events of the morning Tom carried away a jumbled memory. The only thing he recollected clearly was Bob's breaking the schools' record for the broad jump. The rest remained a succession of contests at which he looked on without seeing. Now Standham's yell would ring victoriously across the field, now Conway's. He had a vague notion that Gid Sloane at one time did something rather wonderful, so loud and long was the cheering. But for the most part all the boy's attention seemed in some curious



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fashion cut off from what was passing under his eyes and focused on the thought of his coming race. The junior events were sandwiched in here and there between the others. One or two came in the morning; Tom's was slated for the first thing in the afternoon.

When he took his place he was to all appearances the coolest and steadiest of the boys entered. Bob was there to start him. The thought flashed into Tom's mind as he felt Bob's final grip that the outcome of this race meant almost as much to the older boy as it meant to him. Then he put that idea aside and listened to Bob's last instructions.

"Just get ahead and keep there. Eyes to the front, you know, and forget the others. Put your whole mind on the race."

Bob stepped back and Tom waited for the signal. On one side of him was a red-headed, clean-limbed boy with snapping blue eyes. The eyes had for a minute bored into Tom's anatomy and Tom had a feeling that in that quick scrutiny he had been measured and found wanting. It gave him an uneasy sense of there being something amiss about him. The boy on the other side had paid no heed

to him at all except to find and keep his distance. Beyond the red-headed boy was another Standham runner. Conway had entered three. At the line the five waited. Then the starter fired the pistol and they were off.

All his life afterward Tom could close his eyes at any minute and run that race again. Ahead the track seemed to speed on endlessly. Against his cheek the east wind blew freshly ; once he felt a drop of rain on his nose. He always remembered that drop quite clearly. With it all he had a sense of the regular pad-pad of swift feet that ticked off sharply cut pictures with the rapidity of a vitascope. His memory jumped back to books that he had read where drowning men in a minute of time saw their whole lives unrolled like a panorama. They were queer pictures to flash out against the background of a running track. Now a boy, white and angry, was being put back to bed. Again, the boy was reading, the book open at a picture of other boys racing. Now he saw him cross the goal line at the head of a dozen panting figures. Pad-pad-pad. Two men stood beside a white bed.

"Ach, but he vill valk—yet soon," said the kind-eyed doctor. The German face changed to Bob's as he had seen it on the hill in the fall. Then through a fog of noise came Bob's voice near by, eager, encouraging.

"Steady, steady. You're almost there. Faster now, Tom! Spurt!"

Tom woke to the fact that he was pounding side by side with the red-headed boy. His breath came short. Put your whole mind on the race. Eyes ahead. Don't worry about the others. He set himself to follow out Bob's orders. The fog of noise closed in about him. Before his eyes on a level with his chest a white tape danced giddily. He crossed the line, ran on a few steps and tumbled into Bob's arms.

When he opened his eyes again his head was pillowed on Bob's knees. Other boys were standing around him. One flapped a wet towel in his face. Tom pushed the towel away and turned his face up to Bob's.

"Did I win?" he asked.

Bob's eyes dropped. "You did finely—you ran splendidly. Hear that? That's what Standham thinks of you."

"T-H-O-M-P-S-O-N!"

"Thompson! Thompson! THOMPSON!"

"Then the other fellow—beat?"

Bob spoke honestly. "By only two feet. He spurted just at the end."

Tom sat up. "I'm all right. Thank you, Bob. You mustn't bother about me. Aren't you in this next? I tell you I'm all right."

"Hurry up, Farrar!" somebody shouted. "They're calling the hurdles."

"I'll see you after this," Bob said hastily. "Wait for me over by our benches, Tom."

He hurried away, peeling off his sweater as he went.

"Better luck next time, Thompson!" The boys offered what comfort they could to the defeated runner. "Second place isn't to be sneezed at, you know."

On his way to the gymnasium and every-day clothes, Tom met Gid Sloane. The miler let his hand fall on the smaller boy's shoulder as he said heartily, "You put up a good race, Thompson. Congratulations!"

But to Tom no words of praise tasted just then anything but bitter. Bob, looking for him after the hurdle races were over, found

no trace of the boy. Inquiry showed that nobody had seen him since early afternoon.

The hours passed and the meet was finished. At the end the clouds that had lowered all day drew closer, and in a drizzling rain Standham took the road to the station. Bob, making a tour of the home train, came upon a little figure huddled in the last seat of the rear car, its face turned resolutely toward the dripping window-pane.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE QUADRANGULAR MEET

Bob sat down and threw his arm over the back of the seat.

"Hello," he said. "I didn't think you'd desert your friends like this, Tom."

The figure wriggled.

"Don't, Bob," it said miserably.

"I suppose you think you are the only fellow who ever got licked. Well, you're not!"

"Bob—you don't mean—— Oh, Bob, didn't you beat?" Incredulity looked out of the brown eyes flashed suddenly on Farrar's face.

"I won in the two-twenty, in the hundred yard sprint and the broad jump. I lost both hurdle races.

"To Fuller?"

Bob nodded. Fuller got away quicker than I did every time. Oh, we may as well be blue together, Tom. It's not so lonesome, and anyhow we've plenty of company."

Tom sat up straight in great distress. "They never went and won the meet!" he cried.

"Ten points ahead," Bob answered. "They got left on their fifty point boast all right, but I reckon that was just a bluff. We made 'em shake in their shoes for a while and knocked some of the cocksureness out of 'em, I guess. That did us good. Oh, yes, we scared 'em and broke a record or two, but we lost for all that. See here, how much do you know about what went on back there to-day?"

Tom hung his head. "Not much," he confessed. "But I saw you beat in the morning," he added earnestly, "in the hundred and at the broad jump."

"That all?"

Tom cudgeled his memory. It yielded him only vague returns. "Gid Sloane did something, didn't he?"

"Well, I should say he did! Bettered his last year's record for the mile. You do need coaching with a vengeance, youngster. Is that the best you can do in the reporting line? Guess I'll have to take you in hand. Can't let you get back to Standham in such a pitch black state of ignorance. Here goes. We'll

begin with my bunker. What'd he do at the running high jump?"

Tom hazarded a guess. "Beat."

"Right you are. Give me his record."

This was too much.

"Six feet," supplied Bob. "Any notion now about the half-mile?"

Tom inspected his recollections and found them missing at this point. "Conway got that, with Jackstraws second. Pole vault?"

Tom shook his head.

"That fell to Conway too by a small margin. Ned Hensley bagged second and we got fourth place too. Spud took third in the hurdles. Scrap Hayes——"

Bob paused but Tom did not take up the tale.

"Scrap won second place in the mile run, Conway's man fell to third. Not much for them in the long distance stunts. Pitkin captured the two-mile easily.

So Bob went on, running over the events, supplying the gaps in Tom's memory. As he listened the wish to get out of sight of everybody he had ever known, a desire that had held him for the last few hours, left the

smaller boy. After all, it was good to have Bob talking to him, to feel Bob's arm behind him stretched along the top of the seat. And if Bob had been beaten, too—but he wished Bob hadn't been. Even though it left him lonely in his own defeat, he wanted Bob always to win.

"But, hold on!" Bob was saying, "I've news for you. There's hope for us yet. Another chance. That quadrangular meet is on again."

Tom brightened. "Honest?" he cried. "Why—how—I thought——"

Bob laughed. "So did we all. Just at the end of the afternoon their athletic association officers fixed it up with ours. Some fellows think they waited to see how things were coming out. I don't know about that, they seemed so sure of victory before the meet began, though they're awful bluffers, those Conway chaps. You knew there was talk of going on with the scheme, didn't you, leaving out Conway and having a triangular meet. So now if Oak Hill and Derry High agree to let Conway in, the quad is a go, sure."

"They will, won't they?"

Something in the anxiety of the tone made Bob look at his companion sharply.

"You're pretty keen on having Conway in it, aren't you?"

"I'd like another chance at that red-headed boy," said Tom thoughtfully.

Bob chuckled. "Wouldn't mind downing Fuller myself."

The train slowed up at the home station and the Standhamites splashed through puddles to a motley collection of vehicles. Bob pushed Tom up some steps and he stumbled over boys' legs to a seat that by crowding was made for him between Scrap Hayes and a junior-middler. It was a cheerless return. The drizzle had settled into a steady down-pour that drove hard from the east. The boys pulled caps down over their eyes, turned up coat collars, and as the horses started off through the mud attacked the subject of meets, past and to come.

"When's it to be, this big one?" asked Spud.

"Last of the month's the talk," said Hunt.

"Sure thing this time?" Scrap sounded sceptical.

"Guess so," said Breck. "Truman's to write to-night to Oak Hill and Derry High saying Conway's willing to join. If they agree to it Derry High'll wire for representatives of each school to meet somewhere the last of this week and make arrangements. That's the plan our fellows suggest."

"S'pose Conway thinks it can do up the bunch of schools and carry home the championship," Spud remarked.

"S'pose so," asserted Scrap. "You don't reckon they'd stop at thinkin' anything short o' that, do you?"

"Well, we'd have whipped 'em to-day if we'd had anybody to train us beforehand," declared Breck.

"That's so, too," chorused the boys.

"They've got good trainers at all those schools," began Brassey. "Now I want to know what's going to make the big meet, if it comes off, any different from this one? Our fellows have worked 'emselves into the best shape they know how, and I s'pose the gym man's done the best he can to help 'em—which isn't much. Conway got the most points to-day. Conway, or something bet-

ter'n Conway, will get 'em again at this four-sided affair. Standham hasn't a show at the top."

"Only ten points short," Bob objected. "Aren't you putting it a little strong, Brassey? And we barely missed first place half a dozen times."

"A miss is as good as a mile," retorted the boy called Brassey. "I don't mean to be a wet blanket, but ——"

"Well, you are," cried the boys.

"Croaker!"

"Oh, come off," pleaded Scrap. "Can't you think up something cheerfuller to talk about when there's rivers runnin' down inside a fellow's collar? My boots are full up now. Anybody own a dry rag?"

The lights of Standham twinkled into sight and the diversion thus created became permanent.

On the following Sunday Tom wrote again to his cousin, Philip Dane. He argued the college man would by that time be again in New Haven.

"I didn't beat, Phil," wrote Tom. "It was the Conway fellow. He spurted at the

end when there wasn't any more spurt in me. But Bob says I needn't feel ashamed, and Gid Sloane says it was a good race and lots of boys have said things too. So I try not to mind much. But I did want to win in a real race. And there's another one coming, only I'm afraid it won't do me much good. That quadrangular meet I told you about is to happen after all. It's to be here at Standham next week Wednesday. Conway's going into it too. Bob says he'd rather see me break the tape ahead of that red-haired fellow who beat me last week than win out over Fuller in the hurdles. That's just like Bob. He's the best ever. And he says he thinks we could do it if we had somebody to coach us for a week. Somebody that knows something, I mean. I've told you the gym instructor isn't exactly a crackerjack at outdoor stunts. All the boys say he's no good in getting ready for a track meet. But don't give me up yet, Phil—not till after a week from Wednesday. Seem's if I'd give most anything to beat just once.

“Your letter was fine. Hope you had a good time on your trip.

“Tom.”

"Plucky little beggar," said Philip Dane the next morning when he read it. "And I like this Bob, too. Teddy, pass over those time tables, won't you? On the desk there."

Two minutes later he tossed them aside. "Foster," he remarked, "you'll have to find somebody to take my place to-morrow."

The men lounging about the room sat up.

"What's the matter? You're not going back on 'Foster's Folly,' Dane?"

"Oh, I say," protested a plump, pink-cheeked young man, "the car won't know how to go without you, Phil. I can't let you off."

"Sorry, but I'm afraid you'll have to. I'm planning to run up to Standham this afternoon for the rest of the week."

Tom and Bob happened to be at the station on Monday when the five o'clock train from the south pulled in. Bob was there to look up an express box that had failed to make its expected appearance at No. 29, Stone Hall, and Tom had come along to serve as company. They wheeled in the door of the express office as the train rumbled to a stop and watched it idly. A woman with a baby in her arms

boarded the day coach opposite where the boys stood. From the Pullman at the rear a tall young man swung to the gravel. He was the only passenger to leave the train. Tom stared, unable to believe the testimony of his eyes.

"Hello, Tom," called the stranger.

"Phil!"

Tom flew down the platform.

"How are you, youngster? Looking fit. Farrar, isn't it? Glad to meet you; heard a good bit about you from Tom here." He yielded his suit-case to the bewildered boys. "So this is Standham. Where do you keep the school?"

"Just a mile away, Phil, behind those trees over there."

"Well, you are rather in the woods, aren't you? I don't see the ubiquitous trolley either."

"It's on the other side," explained Bob. "It runs past the campus and joins us with the other railroad. The station is five miles off but people often take that road because of the trolley connection. There's more than one way of reaching Standham, Mr. Dane."

"So I see. I'll remember next time. Good thing to offer visitors variety."

"Phil," Tom burst out as they turned into the road, "what are you here for?" The bluntness of the question struck him and he hurried to correct himself. "I mean—have you come really to visit or—or what?" he finished lamely.

Philip Dane glanced down at the boy beside him, a look of drollery lurked in his eyes. "Oh," he answered lightly, "I heard there were things doing up here that I thought I'd better take a hand in myself. I suppose I can find a shake-down somewhere in the village. There is a village, isn't there?"

The boy stood stock still. Across his face sped surprise, wonder, unbelief, dawning hope. They gave way to a great and speechless joy.

"I wouldn't stay there too long," said young Dane, "or we won't have time to get in a practice run to-night."

"Yes," said Bob when the run was over and Tom had carried off his cousin to get ready for supper. "Yes, that's Dane of Yale, the crack sprinter." He stood in the middle of a group of boys that had gathered, curious as to the tall stranger's identity and purpose. "He's up here for the week. Says he

thought it a pity Standham should lose a meet just for lack of a little extra finish. Tom wrote him, you see, about Conway. He's offered to help us out. Of course he came up mostly on Tom's account, but he says he'll be glad to give points to all the fellows he can. He's to be in my study to-night. And if those of you who are entered for the meet will drop around he'll make appointments with you for to-morrow." Bob's eyes sparkled. "I tell you, boys, we are just in luck! Mr. Dane's a dandy and track stunts are his long suit."

While Bob was answering questions and throwing out further bits of information, the baseball team straggled up from the field after practice. The particular stars had each his own following of admiring boys, big and little. Since Saturday Denslow had ridden on the topmost wave of athletic popularity and his train was large. For on Saturday, with him behind the home plate, Standham had wrested a victory from the hitherto unbeaten Derry High nine, and to the catcher had fallen much of the praise.

"What'd we tell you!" boys had declared

triumphantly after the game. "Ned Denslow's the pick o' the whole shootin' match. Ain't a nine that's got a man can faze him!"

"Well, I just guess!" had come the answer.

Now "junes" contended with each other for the honor of carrying his mask and mit. Not even ju-mids would have despised the opportunity.

Denslow was laughing with the captain of the nine at the minute he passed Bob's group. The boys gave him room admiringly. With several he exchanged a jolly word or two. Then his eyes, cool and disdainful as ever, met Bob's. He nodded shortly, as usual, and strode on.

The five rang and the group scattered. Shorty, who had lounged on the outer rim of the circle, joined himself to Bob and the two tramped toward Stone.

"A penny for your thoughts, Bobby."

Bob roused himself from his brown study.

"Let's see your money."

Shorty promptly pulled up a copper from his trousers pocket. "My last cent, doubter. Lot to give for an idea, a fellow's last red. D'you s'pose I got cheated?"

"'Fraid you did, Shorty."

"I'll try to weather it then. I'm cleaned out for the Fat Lady. I'll wager my head on that."

Bob flushed. "Why do you think so?"

"Saw your polite salutations in passing. I can add two and two and not make 'em five."

"I was thinking," said Bob, "that if we were fellows in a book one of us would fall into the river and come near drowning, or almost burn up in a dormitory fire. Then the other'd step in and haul him out and everything would be O. K. They know how to work these things in books."

Shorty eyed Bob through narrowed lids. "Thinkin' you'd like to see the Fat Lady pull out a peace pipe and ask you to smoke it with him?"

"I'm not looking for that just yet, old fellow. Reckon if he did I wouldn't know enough to answer back, I'd be so floored."

"Oh, I guess not." Shorty stopped a minute at the foot of the steps leading into Stone. "The Fat Lady 'll come 'round some day if he's worth his salt. Don't you worry, B. F."

CHAPTER XIX

"THREE CHEERS FOR BOB FARRAR"

THE morning of the quadrangular meet dawned clear and sunny. A shower the night before had laid the dust and left here and there a lazy cloud to drift like a white sail over the blue of the sky. The air was neither too hot nor too cold. In short, the weather conditions were as nearly ideal as a school could ask for on such an occasion.

"We couldn't have bettered things if we'd sent in an order to the Weather Bureau," was Scrap's way of putting it during breakfast at the training table.

Early in the forenoon the competing schools began to pour delegations on to Standham's campus. Oak Hill and the Derry High School arrived together after an amicable five mile trolley ride. They were disposed to treat Standham's committee of welcome with good-natured politeness and friendly comradeship. Mutual respect and goodwill prevailed. Many of the athletes from the three schools

had known each other before in other capacities than as members of track and field teams. Gid Sloane carried off Derry High's football ex-captain to the clerk of the course and together they secured their numbers. The pitcher of the High's nine, happening on Denslow, insisted that Standham's catcher should meet Oak Hill's battery.

"Here's what you Hillites will run up against on Saturday," he said. "When he comes to bat, maybe you'll know what hit you. I confess I didn't last week."

Over in the middle of the field Jack Truman and Ned Hensley hobnobbed with boys whom they had worsted at hockey in the winter. Shorty, by the bleachers, quarreled cheerfully with the possessors of big red and blue megaphones. The red marked Derry High's man, the blue was Oak Hill's property. Even Philip Dane, who had come up from New Haven for the meet, discovered a man he knew in Derry High's trainer and taking him by the arm walked him off to a corner where they could get "talked up-to-date." Tom Thompson, inwardly aquiver with excitement, tried to look unconcerned while he

scraped acquaintance with two visitors of his own size. "Yes," they said, "we've entered for the junior races, the hundred yards and the hurdles. What's your stunt?" Between the three schools there was a truce to hostility. Peace and pleasantness ruled.

Then a "Razzle dazzle! Razzle dazzle! Ric! Sac! Bang!" ripped out from barges just driven up from Standham station, and Conway's yellow caps, set at a confident and contemptuous angle on the heads beneath, swaggered into sight. They overran the grounds, paid scant attention to Standham's attempts to meet and greet them and electrified the atmosphere generally.

"Those fellows make us sick," Oak Hill confided to Derry High. "We don't love 'em a little bit."

"To hear 'em you'd think there wasn't any doubt about their liftin' the championship," Derry High remarked to Standham.

"Modesty ain't their strongest point," Standham drawled back.

Tom, wriggling his way through the crowd, came face to face with his red-haired rival of the other meet. "Hello!" he said.

The red-headed boy stared at him a minute with his snapping blue eyes. "Hello, yourself! Want another lickin' to-day?"

He pushed on insolently. Tom could hear the boys with him laughing. He swallowed down a hot retort and walked away. "An athlete never forgets to be a gentleman." He repeated the words over twice to himself. But he would like to teach that red-haired fellow a lesson, he'd like to teach it to him on the track this very day. He was going to. Tom shut his lips in a thin determined line. He was no green runner now, he was a veteran. A veteran of only one race, it was true, and defeated at that, but one race made a big difference in a fellow's experience. It steadied him, so Tom argued; he knew what to expect now. Those queer leaden weights wouldn't drag at his legs so hard this time, if they tried it he thought he could shake them off. And his mind was to be kept to the business in hand. All at once Tom felt sorry for the red-headed boy, the boy who had taunted him with his defeat; he was going to be beaten and he wouldn't know how to take it. He had not known how to take victory.

Curiously enough all Tom's doubts had flown to the winds. Two weeks was a long time. He knew he was not where he had been a fortnight ago, his Cousin Philip had seen to that. There was no elation in Tom's heart, no pride, no boastfulness, only a very quiet resolution.

The officials of the meet now began to fly about in livelier fashion. Clerks hurried here and there. The rival schools separated themselves from each other and gathered about their leaders. Standham had no such fine grandstand as Conway. There was a raised wooden platform, equipped with chairs brought out for the occasion, and reserved for members of the faculty and guests of the school. Behind this rose lines of bleachers, the mere skeleton of a stand. On to these boards and overflowing them surged the boys who had come to yell and look on and the slogans of the competing schools smote the air in prolonged uproar.

Standham had the extreme left of the bleachers. A short muscular senior led the cheering in the middle section, Shorty was stationed at the left of him, Denslow presided

over the mob bunched on the grass at the right. With gusto Standham dinned the names of its first-place men into Conway's ears and Conway returned the compliment with interest.

In the midst of the racket Mr. Wetherell appeared, making his way toward the platform.

"Three times three!" signaled Standham's leader.

Denslow and Shorty at their stations on the sides took up the word. "Lively!" they bawled through their megaphones. "Three times three for the Prin! All ready now."

The shoulders of the three leaders pumped up and down in unison. Mr. Wetherell smilingly acknowledged the cheers and took his seat. With him was a slender man whose keen forceful face looked oddly familiar and yet unfamiliar to the boys near enough at hand to get a good view of him. "Thompson's father," passed from lip to lip. The words reached the senior in command.

"Three cheers for Thompson's father!" he ordered.

They were given with a will. Standham

was in a mood to yell for anything and everything even remotely connected with the school. Philip Dane, passing below, won an ovation. He looked up at the shouting, pounding lines of boys and waved his cap. Whereupon they did it again.

The marking out of courses for contestants in the hundred yard dash was finished, and the runners were now getting into position. The starter took his place, pistol in hand. Conway was on its feet bellowing rahs for Fuller. Oak Hill and Derry High were far from silent.

"Farrar!" bawled the senior to his lieutenants. "Drown out Conway, fellows! Give Bob a big send-off now."

The sub-leaders took up the word.

"He never turned a hair," muttered one of Denslow's admirers afterward, "and we all know he hasn't any use for Bob."

"Well, he couldn't, could he?" retorted the boy addressed. "Ned's appointed to help lead the yelling to-day. He's got to sink his prejudices while he stands for the school."

In Standham's opinion the meet began well. Bob captured the hundred yards as he had a

fortnight earlier, but with two differences. To Conway's great surprise, he got away noticeably quicker than Fuller. As Fuller's boasted superiority lay in the quickness of his starts, this pleased and encouraged the Standhamites mightily. They whooped like wild Indians when Bob's lead was seen to be measured by feet instead of inches, and their hopes shot up like sky-rockets.

"We'll show 'em what Standham can do with training of the right sort," declared Spud.

"Say, if we can keep all our firsts and get some more to put with 'em, why—why ——" Scrap cried.

"Yes," mimicked Shorty, "and if we could jump over the moon, why—why —— Well, I guess there wouldn't anybody come near us, that's why. We can't expect to clean out quite the whole show."

"Well, let's not miss anything that's comin' to us for lack o' yellin'."

They didn't, though in the matter of keeping all their firsts they had reckoned without Derry High and Oak Hill. Gid Sloane won the mile easily with Derry High second, Scrap

third, and Conway fourth, but the High took the two mile in a hot finish, Pitkin getting second and Oak Hill third. Jack Truman captured the running high jump, the High's man falling half an inch short. The broad jump was Bob's, with Conway next. Ned Hensley held second place at the pole vault, Derry High securing first. It did Standham good to see Conway worsted at the hands of the High, but it did not improve Conway's temper.

"Just wait till the hurdles and the twenty dash," yelled the yellow-capped contingent. "Then we'll teach you a thing or two."

"You're welcome to try!" bellowed Shorty. "Reckon we can make out to stand it if you can."

For all their sturdy words both schools were worked up to a frenzy of excitement when the two hundred and twenty yard dash was called. Young Dane met Bob and walked with him to the starting point.

"Fuller looks to me to be mad clear through, no very good preparation for a race. I fancy you'll weather it, Farrar, but don't take any chances."

Then he strolled back to Derry High's trainer. "Rather unusual chap, that Farrar," he said. "All-round athlete to a degree you don't run across every day. Makes me think of what's his name, the University of Pennsylvania fellow. You know the one I mean. Shouldn't wonder if Farrar turned out such another. No reason why there shouldn't be more like him, either."

"No," returned Derry High's trainer, "no reason except that most boys who go in for athletics specialize too soon."

On the track Bob was finding his foot holes and getting into position. He had nodded with a word to Fuller, and that young man had given him a surly "Do" in reply. Bob decided to let him alone hereafter. He let himself down on one knee to wait, and focused his whole attention on the coming race. If he could beat Fuller, well and good; if he couldn't, he wouldn't scowl about it. With steady nerves he noted the orders and obeyed.

From the crack of the pistol, Bob lost sight of his rivals. He heard feet pounding close behind to his right and left, but with all his might he followed Philip Dane's instructions

and summoned every muscle to aid him in those first strides. As he sped on, the feet to the right gradually fell away; only the runner at the left was near him, he judged. On this side the feet drew nearer, Fuller was spurting. Bob flew steadily on. No spurt for him yet. Hot panting breaths told him Fuller was at his elbow. Shouts reached him, a confused babel, encouraging, commanding, pleading. Still he held evenly on his course.

Ahead he saw the tape stretched; the judges, two on either side, waiting; the timekeepers, watches in hand. He was on the last fifty yards. Beside him the voices grew more insistent. The track was lined with boys, red,—yellow,—purple,—blue-badged, they leaped and shouted, calling on their runners to spurt. The Crowd had pushed its way close to the judges and there it whooped valiantly, like two instead of a dozen boys, and one short at that. "Sprint, Bobby, sprint!" "Come in! Come in!" "Hit her up there!"

Bob saw, and above the rest of the din he heard them, even while he listened to that heavy breathing close behind. The pace quickened. The runners had entered on the

last ten yards and Fuller would spurt again. Bob gathered himself up for the final lap. Like a race horse he drove forward, his feet flashed over the last five yards and he crossed the line.

"My, but that was a race!" gasped Standham, breathlessly. "Bob had the lead from the first, but he kept us guessin' to the end whether or not he'd hold it."

They swung him to their shoulders jubilantly.

"Let me down, you idiots!" the victor commanded. "I say, let me down. What's that they're calling? Thompson's race?"

Tom from his place next the red-haired boy saw Bob coming and smiled pluckily. The boys in line with him regarded the tall sprinter with admiring looks. Bob pushed over to Tom's side. "I'll be waiting for you at the tape, Tom," he said.

That was all. Tom saw him join his Cousin Phil. He strained his eyes toward the platform for a glimpse of his father, but there were too many people in the way. That he was there watching, the boy knew. He felt again the tingling grip of Phil's hand as he

had said, "Go in to beat, Tom." He saw again the encouragement in Bob's gray eyes; he wouldn't fail Bob at the finish this time. Then he put all such thoughts away. Beside him the red-headed boy was also waiting. He had the inside position, Tom came next, then Derry High, at the outside Oak Hill.

"Remember when you're two strides ahead of Red-top you've a right to the inside track. Take it, and take it quick," Philip Dane had said when the result of the toss up for places was announced. Tom was remembering. His heart had stopped pounding; this time he not only looked but felt cool and steady and quiet. To himself he seemed one bit of embodied resolution—to win.

"Set!"

Crack! At the report the line dove and sprang forward. Not all were using the crouching start. The red-headed boy and Tom straightened gradually to their feet. Tom, holding fast his cousin's injunction, threw himself, nerve, soul, muscle, into those first few paces. He passed the red-haired one and crossed to the inside.

"Thompson's ahead!"

“Tom has the pole!”

“Bully for the youngster!”

“Thompson! Thompson! Thompson!”

On the platform the gentleman beside the principal leaned forward in his seat. He had not been so excited since his own school-days. He scarcely heard the shouts, the deeper voices of the older boys blended with the shrill staccato of the runners' classmates. His whole attention was centred in the little figure that held the inside track. Slowly, very slowly, but still surely, the red-headed runner was gaining. A pace or two behind him pounded Derry High. Oak Hill was hopelessly in the rear.

“Keep it up, Thompson!”

“Go it, High!”

“Pass him, Carrots! Pass him!”

The red-headed boy responded with another spurt. The space between him and the forward runner closed until the strip of grass and track was blotted out. Tom's breath came hot and fast now, his throat ached. They were nearing the finish. All his being strained toward one end, not to let the red-haired boy pass him. Desperately he panted

on. Something forged up alongside. Tom's eyes were straight to the front, not for worlds would he have disobeyed orders and looked around even to the extent of a glance out of the corner of his eye, but he knew what it was. A wretched feeling of defeat clutched him. He beat it off and struggled to keep his lead. With a choke in his throat he tried to spurt, but his feet weighed tons. The red-haired runner was almost even with him now, in a minute he would shoot by and then ——

“Rah, rah, rah, Conway!”

“Bully for Carrots!”

Razzle dazzle! Razzle dazzle!

Ric! Sac! Bang!

Explosively the yells rattled about Tom's ears. Then beyond the tape and the judges he saw Bob step out into the track. The world cleared, the strain lifted. Bob was there, Bob was waiting for him. With a return of his first untired energy Tom answered to the stimulus of Bob's presence.

The next thing he knew, Bob, his eyes shining, was wrapping a blanket around him,

his Cousin Phil was shaking his hand enthusiastically, a dozen boys were trying to clap him on the back, while twice that number yelled congratulations, unable to get near. "Bully for you, Thompson!" "Good race!" "Great spurt, Tom!" Over all rang Standham's victorious cheer. Tom listened happily. He knew himself at last for a winner.

The rest of the day passed cheerfully enough for Standham. The next best thing to getting first place itself was to see somebody else beat Conway, and the meet was not without its surprises in this respect. Oak Hill produced a hurdler who proved himself a marvel at all distances. "Takes 'em like a bird," was the general comment. As the Hill had made a poor showing in the other events nobody except Conway begrudged her these victories. Bob secured two second places. The best Fuller got was a third in the high hurdles. In the other race he came in fourth.

"Ain't he getting a drubbin'!" grinned the boys.

"Tailing the bunch and mad clear through," said Breck. "That sticks out all over him.

Seems 's if he might try to look a little pleasanter about it."

"Yi—yi!" yelled Standham derisively at Conway. "These are the hurdle races, aren't they? We've waited patiently for 'em. What do you call it you're teaching us?"

Conway glowered in haughty silence.

"Don't seem to fancy getting whipped around the block, do they?" inquired Shorty.

"Good medicine for 'em—sort o' civilizing," returned Hunt. "But they don't act as though it tasted any too nice."

Denslow at his post listened and grinned. A question was tossed up to him from a newcomer who settled himself among the boys on the grass. "How'd the hammer and shot come out, Ned? I couldn't get over to see 'em myself."

"We walked off with all the cream in sight," answered Denslow.

"Both firsts?"

"Sure."

"What's doing on the field now?" called another.

"Nothing. The discus business comes next, last thing."

"Well, we're ahead all right," said a boy cheerfully. "Say, Bob Farrar must feel pretty well suited with the day's work he's put in. Two firsts and three seconds. Ain't he a peach, though!"

Denslow did not echo the last sentiment, but he agreed well enough with the speaker's other statements. Farrar would not mind about the second places, he reflected, so long as he had beaten Conway's man. It was a great record. Then his eyes dropped to an excited group of Standhamites gathered at the right of the platform. He gave over his megaphone into the hands of an assistant and strolled down to investigate matters. The track did not hold much immediate interest. Circumstances had disarranged the usual order of events and the junior hundred yard run was about to be thrashed out.

"Blake's the only fellow who entered for the discus business," an anxious looking senior was saying as Denslow came up, "only chap here who's ever done anything with it too. Now he's down and out. Strained a tendon in the last race. Farrar's our only hope. Here he comes now!"

The speaker burst through the circle, trailing it after him. "Farrar! Bob Farrar!" he called.

Hurriedly he poured the tale of the situation into Bob's ears. "We'll never hear the last of it if we don't put in somebody," he went on. "Conway's talking about back numbers, saying Standham's only got one man to a stunt—you know how they go on. What we want is to have you substitute for Blake."

"But I've never handled the discus more than half a dozen times in my life," demurred Bob.

"But Blake says you've made some pretty good throws. And he's ready to put you next to the rules. There's nobody for it unless you come in."

"You don't look to make any points out of this, do you?" Bob asked.

"No, no. Nothing but to save our reputation and keep Conway quiet."

"All right. How soon's it called?"

"In half an hour."

"You're not going to do it, Bob!" expostulated two or three voices.

"Why not?"



"YOU'RE NOT GOING TO DO IT!"

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"Lower your record," said Hunt promptly. "Those firsts and seconds o' yours make too pretty a looking set to spoil."

"Oh, if somebody's got to jump into the breach and take a licking," Bob spoke in a matter-of-fact tone, "it might as well be I as another fellow." He strode off with the senior to find Blake.

Denslow watched him in silent amazement. He had thought Farrar a coward when it came to risking his athletic reputation. It was on that discovery his liking for Bob had made shipwreck in the fall. The quarterback who had made excuse and stayed at home rather than risk defeat with loss of popularity and prestige had not been one at a moment's notice to go into a field event he was not prepared for. But was Farrar so unused to discus-throwing as he claimed? Denslow decided to be on hand at the contest and judge for himself. What he saw did not solve the riddle. Standham's man tied with one of Oak Hill's for fourth place, a come-down indeed for a boy who had all day fallen no lower than firsts and seconds. Denslow acknowledged himself puzzled. For the first

time doubt crossed his mind—had he judged Bob Farrar aright? He was turning the matter over in his thought as he halted to hear the announcement of the meet's result.

“Standham wins with fifty-two points; Derry High, forty-four; Conway thirty; Oak Hill, seventeen.”

It was no surprise, everybody had kept track of the points won or lost by all sides. There followed a rattling cheer or two and then the rush for trolleys and barges began.

Tom Thompson, on the lookout for Bob, pounced on him after the discus contest and led him up to the platform where the principal and his guest were getting to their feet.

“Father,” he said by way of introduction, “this is Bob.”

Mr. Thompson turned with a quick smile. “Oh, I know Bob,” he said. “I think I have known him almost as long as has Tom here.” He was shaking hands cordially with the senior-middler: “You have made my little chap into a real boy, Farrar, a boy among boys, and it has done me as much good as it has him.”

Catching sight of Philip Dane in the crowd,

Tom left them talking and started to make his way across to his cousin. He had not gone far when a voice arrested him.

The voice was saying with a mixture of wonder, uncertainty and earnestness in its tones, "You fellows talk as if you thought Farrar owned the earth and had a mortgage on the solar system!"

The sally raised a laugh. "Maybe we do," drawled somebody.

A gust of fierce anger shook Tom. He whirled and confronted Denslow.

"If you say another word against Bob Farrar," he cried, "I—I'll fight you!"

CHAPTER XX

SHOULDER TO SHOULDER

IN astonished silence Denslow stared for a minute at the small figure confronting him with clenched fists and flashing eyes, white fury in its face.

"Bob Farrar's just the best fellow in this whole school," blazed the boy, "and if you were anywhere near as fine and brave and big as he is, Ned Denslow, you'd know it! I don't care if you can play baseball, you just stop talking about him like that! You've been mean, mean as dirt to him all the year and now you go and try to poke fun. But don't you ever do it again or I—I ——"

Tom's anger choked him.

"You are a spitfire! Regular hot box." Denslow continued to regard the boy curiously. "D'you mean you'd really try to fight me?"

"Yes, I would! I'll do it, too."

"But I could lick you without half trying, youngster."

"I don't care. I'll fight you if you ever say a thing like that again!"

"Oh, come now, don't get so stirred up. Why, that was half a joke anyhow——"

A rush of Derry High boys making for the trolley swept Tom off into the crowd and cut Denslow's sentence sharply in two.

"What a fire-eater!" thought the senior-middler as he kept on his way. More than one boy had defended Bob Farrar to him before and in no uncertain terms. Their words had glanced easily off the armor of his prejudice. Now Bob's own deed, so contrary to all his notions of what Bob would do, had penetrated that prejudice. Before the discus episode he would have dismissed Tom's words with a laugh. As it was, they set him thinking toward the same conclusion, but along a different line. "When a kid like that offers to fight a fellow three times his size, it means something. Chaps don't invite lickings for nothing. Whew, but he was mad! And all because he thought I said something against his precious Bob Farrar. I wonder—what if I was wrong last fall after all! A fellow must be true blue to have a little chap

stand up for him like that. Thompson's set Farrar on a pedestal, to be sure—but maybe he's hit nearer the facts than I have. There's no getting around that discus business this afternoon. Come to think of it, has there been anything since that Conway game to tally with the notion of his being a quitter?"

The question was a startling one and Denslow walked slowly, sorting his recollections. One by one they ranged themselves on the side of the discus episode. The impression he had carried away from Bob Farrar's room on the night of the football game with Conway stood alone, unsupported.

"Looks like you might have been mistaken that time, Ned Denslow," he admitted at last. "And if you might have been, why don't you say you think you were, and then go it one better and come out fair and square that you were?"

Just at this point he met Gid Sloane.

The miler stopped. "What do you think now about Farrar being a coward and a quitter, Denslow?" he asked. "Is he quite so careful of his athletic reputation as you have fancied him?"

"I've about decided that I was mistaken

last fall, Sloane," said Denslow. "Somehow I guess I got on the wrong trail."

"Good!" Sloane's voice was warm and hearty. "I'm glad to hear you say that. You and Farrar are too fine fellows to be enemies. Shall I tell you now what it was that Farrar couldn't explain last fall?"

Denslow looked up, surprised. "What was it?" he asked.

"I am going to say this," said Gid, "because it is due to you and to Bob to have things made clear. It can't hurt you now. You have found your place in the school all right—we're proud of you, Denslow. But last November—well, to put it baldly, Farrar had to stay at home and play his weak ankle for all and maybe more than it was worth because the team wouldn't have played with you at quarter if Bob had been on hand to go into the game. No eleven ought to discriminate against a player because the other members don't happen to like him, but boys aren't machines and they do it sometimes. Bob couldn't tell you this last fall, but I can now. You're not exactly unpopular at present, Denslow."

The senior-middler stared at the miler. "I'm—much obliged," he said at last. "No, don't wait for me. I guess I'll sit down somewhere and think this out."

In the light of this new idea Denslow reviewed the events of his first term at Standham. His unpopularity, itself the result of a misunderstanding, had caused his misunderstanding of Bob Farrar. Again from beginning to end he went over the happenings of the football season. When he had finished he found that he was sitting on empty bleachers, staring out over an empty field. The shouting crowd had flowed far away. He got to his feet and started for the quadrangle. As he rounded the corner of the gymnasium he came on Bob Farrar tugging at a box.

Denslow hesitated a moment, then he crossed the grass to Farrar's side. "Want some help?" he asked.

Bob looked up, surprise in his eyes, but he spoke quietly. "Thanks. It's a bit clumsy to manage alone. If you'd take that end—I promised I'd see to getting the thing in and then forgot all about it."

"Great Cæsar!" exclaimed Denslow as they lifted the box. "What's in this, anyway—rocks?"

"Hammers and shot. I was figuring that I'd have to make two trips when you came along. Here's where they keep 'em."

On the steps again Denslow turned to Bob abruptly. "Farrar," he said, "I'm rather a hot-headed, obstinate fellow and I've made some mistakes this last year that I'm sorry for. They've hurt me more than anybody else, I guess. Is it too much to ask you to shake?"

Bob's hand was out at once, and the two boys gripped silently. A minute later, shoulder to shoulder they strolled up the path.

"Sloane's just been explaining to me about last fall," said Denslow. "I was a good deal of a chump then. I'll take you on trust after this, Farrar, every time." Then he began to talk about the meet. "Standham's put in a pretty good day, and Conway—well, Conway's had a jolt it won't soon forget. Queer how far it fell below its record two weeks ago."

"That was the High's work," said Bob.
"The High started too lively a tune."

"I'm glad you cleaned out Fuller."

Bob grinned. "So am I."

They turned a corner and dodged a boy tearing down from the direction of Centre Hall. "Heard the news?" gasped the runner, too excited to be surprised at seeing them together.

"What news?"

"Thompson's father's given a grandstand—the money for one, I mean. They're going to put it up this summer—have it ready for the fall games. Conway won't have the chance to crow over us any longer on that score!"

"Oh, I say, that's great!" cried Bob.

"Fine!" echoed Denslow.

The runner dashed on with the news, while the two hurried to join the crowd that could be heard over in the direction of the principal's house trying to explain to Mr. Thompson just what Standham thought of him. Spirits were high but throats hoarse.

The latter fact did not prevent the school from turning out again after supper for a

grand celebration of its victory. Bob Farrar, leaping down the steps of Stone in company with Jack, Shorty, and Ned Hensley was suddenly seized and swung to the shoulders of his classmates. Other boys pounced on Jack and Ned. Seniors caught up Gid Sloane. The main procession greeted them with shouts, and started off, horns blowing, tin pans rattling, combs screaming, on its tour of the campus. Looking down, Bob saw Denslow had a shoulder under him.

With the day's victors bobbing up and down above it, the long line of the jubilant school swept around toward the open lawn in front of Centre Hall. There it halted and before Bob knew what he was about Denslow had given his place to another and had sprung up on the shoulders of two stocky senior-middlers from Horton. As publicly as he had shown his dislike, so publicly would he make his recantation. His voice rang out over the throng and the boys turned toward him wonderingly.

"Here's three times three and a tiger for the pluckiest fellow in Standham," he shouted, "Bob Farrar!"

A roar answered him. There was no doubt about what Standham thought of Bob.

Later in the evening, after they had cheered till voice failed them for Standham, for Mr. Wetherell, for "Thompson's father," for the new grandstand, and on through the list of point winners, the Crowd, tired but happy, Denslow in their midst, headed for Stone Hall. In the path they overtook Shorty, apparently meditating in the moonlight.

"What you doing?" demanded Spud.

"Thinking," croaked Shorty solemnly, "thinking, Spud, of our friends the enemy. Did me good to see 'em to-day. 'Tisn't often Shorty can say a thing like that of Conway. Makes me feel pleasant inside to remember how unpleasant they looked."

Spud chuckled. "Hope Fuller enjoyed his ride home."

Grinning, they dashed up-stairs. It was not in boy nature to suppress satisfaction over Conway's discomfiture. They tramped noisily into the study on the third floor and spread themselves comfortably over couch, window-seat and chairs. Scrap voiced the feeling of the others when he sighed contentedly, "It's

been a big day, sure. Standham's sittin' on the top o' the heap."

"Contemplating a grandstand that's just rising above her horizon," amended Shorty.

"It'll be risen all right by next fall," said Ned Hensley. "Say, Shorty, aren't you glad you're coming back in September to see it?"

"Don't talk about next fall yet," cried Bob. "There's all summer ahead of us. But I really think we ought to have something on that grandstand. What do you say, Jack?"

"Bobby's going to wet our whistles," squeaked Shorty. "Hustle, fellows."

A hasty requisition on rooms near at hand yielded a motley array of articles to swell the number of Jack's six glasses. Bob brought out ginger ale and root beer bottles and Jack drew corks deftly. The boys' throats, dry from yelling, ached with anticipation as the liquid gurgled into mugs and tumblers. Through the open windows entered sounds of footsteps, belated shouts, hoarse attempts at song. The academy was getting homeward, content with itself and the world at large.

"Fall to," commanded Bob and Jack hospitably.

There was no need of a second invitation.

Shorty jumped on a chair and waved his foaming mug in a perilous sweep about his head.

"Standham forever!" he croaked huskily.

"Standham forever!" echoed the Crowd.

THE END









